MUSLIM UMMAH
The Way Forward

Syed Sadatullah Husaini

Translated by
Dr. Parvez Mandviwala

Contents

Translator's Note 9
Acknowledgements 11
Foreword 15

1 Attitude

The Month of Ramadan, Our Attitudes and the COVID Pandemic 25
- Trial, Admonition or Punishment?
- Ramadan, Qur'an and Taqwa
- Ramadan and our Attitudes
- Ramadan 1441 AH
- How Should We Spend This Ramadan?

The Ummah Needs to Focus on its Goal 39
- The Qur'anic Guidance
- The Example of Prophet Ibrahim
- Focus on our Goal: The Real Strength
- Focus on the Goal and Vision, and the Hardships of Life
- The Condition of Indian Muslims

Self-Confidence and ConvictionThe Need of the Hour 55
- Islamic Teachings and Dire Circumstances
- The Current Situation: Putting It into Perspective
- Collective Psychological Health
- Sabr
- Tawakkul
- Taubah

Sabr: An Essential Element of Ummah's Approach 69

The Importance of Sabr in a Community's Story
What Exactly Is Sabr?
What is Impulsiveness and a Lack of Sabr?
Sabr in the Life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ
Indian Muslims and Sabr
The Antitheses of Sabr and the Desired Attitude of Sabr

Tawakkul, Strategy and the Collective Attitude of Ummah 89
The Importance of Tawakkul
The Concept of Tawakkul and Its Philosophy
Tawakkul, and Its Effect on Our Collective Attitude
Tawakkul-based Strategy

2 Public Opinion

Building Public Opinion 111
What is Public Opinion?
Building Public Opinion in Favour of Islam

Public Opinion and the Media 131
Public Opinion and Media
Media and Cultural Colonialism
Social Media
Islam and Media in the Past Four Decades
What We Need to Do

The Post-COVID Scenario and The Islamic Message 147
Past Pandemics and Their Effects
Post-COVID Scenario: The Possibilities Under Discussion:
Towards a Theistic Worldview
The Correct Point of View Regarding Science and Knowledge
Individualism vs. Social Capital and Human Dignity, Control vs. Mutual Cooperation
Economic Justice
Environmental Crisis

3 Facing the Challenges

Financial Crisis and Our Responsibility 165
Contributing Factors: Experts' Opinion

Factors Contributing to the Financial Crisis
Our Responsibilities

Resistance Against Oppression 185
Islamic Teachings and Resistance to Oppression
Resistance: Armed or Peaceful?
Today's Injustice
The Islamic Movement and Resistance Against Oppression

Conspiracism, Conspiracy Theories and The Islamic Stand201
Three Types of Conspiracy Theories
The Hazards of Irrational Conspiracy Theories
Conspiracy Theory: Valid or Invalid?
Conspiracy Theories and the Islamic Viewpoint
How Do We Identify False Conspiracy Theories?
Conspiracy Theories and Ahadith Related to the Last Days
Our Expected Practical Approach

End Time, Dajjal and Conspiracism 225
Narrations Related to End Time, and Conspiracy Theories
Only Allah Knows When the World Would End
Signs of the Doomsday, and Their Three Categories
Emergence of Evil and Disorder (Fitna)
The Major Signs of Doomsday (Alamaat-e-Kubra)
What Should Be Our Approach?

Translator's Note

In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful

It has indeed been an honour and privilege to render Syed Sadatullah Husaini sahab's articles published under *Isharat* of monthly *Zindagi-e-Nau* into English. These articles, which have been written over a year-long period, are a treasure trove of wisdom, research and a deep insight into contemporary Muslim society.

The Indian Muslim community today is struggling to carve out a space for itself, to reclaim its dignity in the social and political arena and to battle the Islamophobic environment that has become almost ubiquitous, and at the same time it is trying hard to adhere to its cultural roots, fight the sectarianism within and come out of the quagmire of despair and vulnerability it finds itself plunged into. And in the midst of all these external and internal skirmishes that are tearing it apart, it also needs to focus on its very *raison d'être*—its goal and ultimate objective.

This book addresses these very concerns. It not only encourages the Ummah to shed away all the baggage that retards its pace and break away from all the fetters that bind its feet, it also shows the Ummah how this can be done. Drawing from the Qur'an, the *hadith* and modern empirical research, the learned author has essentially penned down a practical guidebook for the contemporary Muslim society.

And that is precisely why this book needs to be read. And that is precisely why this book was required in English, just as it is required in every Indian language that Muslims are comfortable reading. Language is but a vehicle. It is a medium that conveys a person's ideas and emotions to his audience. Language should never be a barrier. It is with this hope and intention that the English version of this erudite compilation is being published along with its original Urdu version.

I have sought to employ a very lucid language while rendering these Urdu articles into English, so that it is equally comprehensible to every reader, all the while trying to retain the eloquence and charm of the original text. Since the author is very proficient in English himself, he has meticulously reviewed this rendition, allaying any fear of the purport of his words getting 'lost in translation.' I hope and pray our humble efforts bear fruit.

Keep us in your prayers.

Dr. Parvez Mandviwala

November 2020, Mumbai

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اَلْحَمْدُ لله الَّذِيْ أَرْسَلَ رَسُوْلَهُ بِالْهُدَى وَدِيْنِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّيْنِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُوْنَ ، أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا اله إِلاَّ الله وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُوْلُ الله. اللهم صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى أله وَأَصْحَابِهِ أَجْمَعِيْنَ

To God is due all praise and gratitude who has sent His messenger with guidance and the true deen to proclaim it over all other deen, even though the polytheists might dislike it.

I bear witness that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

May peace and blessings be upon Muhammad and his family and all his companions.

I feel immense pleasure in presenting before the readers this book, which is a compilation of editorial articles published in Urdu in monthly *Zindagi-e-Nau*. Right from the beginning of the publication of this series, there was a huge demand for their English version. I am indeed grateful to Allah *subahanahu wa ta'ala* that today we could present the English translation of these articles. To Allah alone is due all praise and gratitude, Who is the Lord of the universe. I hope and pray that the arguments of this book open up new avenues of thought and contemplation for you, and help us all in seeking practical and plausible solutions to our myriad and complicated problems. Aameen.

I express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to our dear friend, Dr. Parvez Mandwiwala, for his sincere and dedicated efforts in rendering these articles into lucid English.

His wholehearted efforts and exemplary linguistic skills have made the English version very interesting. May Allah reward him the best. Aameen.

I am grateful to the readers of monthly *Zindagi-e-Nau* whose persistent requests and persuasion have led to the publication of this compilation, and whose valuable suggestions and reviews that kept pouring in month after month have enlightened the author and also inspired and motivated him. I owe a debt of gratitude to our kind mentor, Dr. Hasan Raza, for having reviewed most of the essays before their publication and for having contributed with his priceless recommendations. I could also benefit from the suggestions of Dr. Muhammad Rafat, S. Ameenul Hasan, Dr. Raziul Islam Nadvi and certain other friends and elders in quite a few essays. May Allah abundantly reward all these friends and elders. Aameen.

My respected friend, Dr. Muhiuddin Ghazi, needs to be thanked for many a reason. His suggestions have been crucial in practically every essay. Moreover, had it not been for his persistent persuasion, unyielding follow up and unceasing support, these essays could never have been published in their present form. I also thank him for lending a soul-stirring foreword to this book, which has greatly increased its worth and value. May Allah make him grow in skill and knowledge and accept great services from him in His blessed cause. Aameen.

The sincere effort and dedication that my dear brother, Irfan Waheed, has put in to edit and format this book make him deserving of my special gratitude and appreciation.

I also thank those friends who have been releasing audio versions of these essays every month in the form of audio books.

I am thankful to brothers and sisters who have been meticulously translating these essays into Tamil, Malayalam,

Telugu and Gujarati.

May Allah abundantly reward all these friends and elders.

Syed Sadatullah Husaini

New Delhi, November 11, 2020

Foreword

Action Plan for Muslim Ummah Essential Prerequisites

By Dr. Muhiuddin Ghazi

Two inmates of a prison once had a dream. It was about their personal lives. Several years later, the Emperor of the kingdom had a dream. This dream was related to the future of the entire nation. His courtiers did not take his dream seriously, but the Emperor kept getting anxious about it. At long last, Yusuf, who had been languishing in prison since ages, not only interpreted his dream, but also offered a plausible solution to avert the impending catastrophe looming large over the nation. The right strategy at the right time saved the entire nation from an otherwise certain doom.

Although eloquent sermons do play a role in rousing a nation from deep slumber, in showing a deprived people the path to success and in motivating an oppressed class to stand up to injustice, what they also require is a well thought-over and researched action plan. In the absence of a diligent strategy, fiery speeches can only stir some silent waters, they can never bring about a change

Enlightened, reform-friendly and progressive communities understand very well the power of strategy, and employ it too.

Their condition is always the outcome of their planning, and their planning is always in complete sync with their condition.

While it is indeed true that, at every level and for every community, planning a course of action does involve some prerequisites, the unique case of the Muslim Ummah makes it necessary to add some specific additional prerequisites to the general list.

Allow me to enumerate some of those prerequisites which need to be considered in all good measure whenever a course of action is chalked out for the Muslim Ummah.

Realising the Importance of One's Goal and Objective

The Muslim Ummah has a special purpose and objective vis-à-vis the other communities of the world. It should be seen to it that any action plan that concerns the prosperity of the Ummah serves and contributes to the realisation of this goal and objective. Without an in-depth understanding of the goal and an emotional attachment with it, it is impossible for the Ummah to arrive at a viable action plan. If the goal is ignored, it is quite possible that other driving factors would come in the way of its realisation, making the action plan far removed from the actual goal. An action plan that is detached from the goal can certainly help the Ummah solve some immediate issues, but the Ummah can never employ it to reach its destination. In order to understand the goal and objective properly, it is necessary to derive from divine revelation. Divine revelation is the only and complete source for any and every detail regarding the goal and objective.

Deriving from Divine Revelation

It is commonly assumed that while Qur'anic ayahs help us

in defining our ideology, we need to turn to human experiences and wisdom to formulate our plans and strategies. But this is not completely true. The fact remains that Qur'anic ayahs are rich in content even in the field of practical guidance. These ayahs contain exhaustive material for planning and strategy. If we turn to Qur'anic ayahs and derive from their guidance while formulating our strategies and planning our course of action, we get there plenty of material and guiding principles.

It is another story that few attempts have been made to tap into those guidelines. People most often turn to Qur'anic ayahs when they need to substantiate their arguments, not to derive guidance. It cannot be denied that when one comes across an idea, one should indeed turn to the Qur'an to determine its veracity and derive arguments for or against that idea. But it is also true that the real purpose one should turn to the Qur'an is to obtain guidance from its ayaat.

Some very important points regarding our course of action can be found in the Qur'an—if we do not extract them from the Qur'an, it is quite possible that we would remain oblivious of them. Hence, deriving practical guidance from the Qur'an is not just a discretionary act, but an utmost necessary one.

Deriving from Human Efforts

Along with guiding us in determining the details of our strategy and course of action, the divine revelation not only permits us but also encourages us to derive from human efforts, i.e., from the human intellectual pursuit and human experience.

Deriving from human effort while formulating a course of action is as much necessary for the Muslim Ummah as it is for any other community or nation.

Those who treat divine revelation as their source of guidance are more fortunate in the sense that they have access

to two resources. Apart from human experience and legacy, they also have the privilege of deriving guidance from the rich corpus of divine revelation.

Anyway, strategy experts are expected to have a rich amount of human experience. Derived from thought and contemplation and experience-based discoveries, inventions, creativity, variation and uniqueness, this human asset comes very handy in drawing out a course of action for individuals as well as for nations.

A Deep Understanding of the Prevailing Conditions

A superficial, partial and one-sided analysis of the prevailing conditions does not lend any help in formulating a course of action; instead, it only weakens and misguides it. It often so happens that the truth lies buried somewhere while the propaganda machinery displays an altogether different picture. A mere opinion is shown as a mountain, and a storm is covered up under talks of the river's calmness. Thus, instead of relying upon assumptions or hearsay to understand the situation, it is necessary to keep our ears to the ground. It is also necessary to stay in touch with reliable sources and possess the ability to weed out the false news items from the true ones.

Protecting Oneself from Being Vulnerable

An ordinary man gets influenced by the prevailing conditions. Depressing situations depress him, pleasant situations make him complacent and scary situations scare him. Any strategy that is chalked out in such a vulnerable state is most likely bound to fail. Similarly, if a person does not sense the prevailing conditions, he lives in an abstract world. Such men speak of action plans which have no relevance to the ground situation. A proper action plan calls for a proper understanding of the prevailing conditions, a feel of the nitty-gritties thereof

and a sense of concern about it, but there should not be any vulnerability on our part.

Being Concerned, Not Impulsive

Impulsiveness blinds the eyes. Concern, on the other hand, makes our vision sharper. Falling prey to impulsiveness, the entire community forgets its priorities and becomes neglectful of its true objectives. Often, a small thing is blown out of proportion, while disproportionate attempts to ward off a small loss invite colossal losses.

It is necessary to keep impulsiveness at bay and hold on to our concerns while formulating an action plan. Just as it is unwise to take any decision in a fit of rage, so also one should never recklessly plan a strategy. Concern is the only thing that compels us to think deeply and expend all the intellectual resources at our disposal.

Respond, Not React

Planning a course of action on a reactionary note is akin to sabotaging the interests of the entire community. We should instead plan a proper response. A reactionary attitude narrows down our scope of thinking and restricts our options. While reaction is a natural human element, this attitude plunges man into an unnatural situation. To come out of this attitude and to think of the best possible response is essential to a good action plan.

Foresight

A major reason why people fall prey to undue apprehensions about the future or have a laid back attitude is that they tend to view the future from the lens of their present circumstances. It is indeed necessary to keep an eye on the future while planning any course of action. However, this does not mean that the future should be assumed to mimic the present. Foresight requires

that a person should look beyond the present circumstances. A foresighted person should be able to differentiate between the transient situation and the permanent condition.

Equally Beneficial to All

It is imperative that the action plan should accommodate the entire Ummah. If an action plan is made for the entire Ummah, its internal divisions should not affect it. It should be equally significant and beneficial for every group and organisation of the Ummah. If a course of action is designed keeping only one's own group in mind, it would not qualify as the entire Ummah's course of action, regardless of whatever it is called.

Transparency and Sincerity

This action plan should be prepared for the benefit of the entire Ummah with all sincerity. It should not reek of any clandestine agenda. The general benefits and results expected from the action plan should be very clear. While it is necessary to protect ourselves from being the target of people's undue suspicions, it is not at all advisable to cover up facts to make the action plan more palatable.

Kind Relations With Other Communities

Just as our relatives are predestined, this country and all the communities residing here are part of the Muslim Ummah's destiny. It thus follows that bonds of kindred should be maintained with them. Keeping aloof from them in our quest for success would lead us nowhere; it would be like building castles in the air. This action plan would remain incomplete and wanting if it does not offer the Muslim Ummah any clear guide-plan and strength and encouragement to contribute wholeheartedly to the progress and development of the country.

An Unbiased Assessment and Appraisal

If we want to keep ourselves from committing a mistake, it is but necessary to point them out. A proper action plan can only be prepared if errors in the strategy are called out. Accommodating sentiments at the cost of the final result and outcome can never be acceptable. Even the leadership can be the target of this assessment and appraisal. The emotions and sentiments of the public may have to be hurt. The strategies and policies that have been adopted in the past might also have to be brought under scrutiny. But such bitter pills would have to be swallowed for the greater good.

Being Proactive, Not Stagnant

The final thing about an action plan is that it should show us the path to positive action. It should not encourage any negative attitudes of defeat or escapism, nor should it offer allowances to stagnancy and procrastination. When the right path appears before the people, they require an action plan which shows them how they can fling open closed doors and make their way through the walls obstructing their march.

In this book, the author, Syed Sadatullah Husaini, has proposed a principled and practical action plan that deals with how Indian Muslims can respond to the myriad problems they face and how they can discharge their responsibilities. How much this action plan fulfils the prerequisites enumerated above is to be decided by men of wisdom and insight; but it certainly makes the reader contented that all these points are duly taken into account in these enlightening essays.

All the articles of this compilation have been written in varying circumstances, each of which was more serious than the other. In such trying circumstances and amid this chaos and confusion, when the intelligentsia and the masses are both

at the brink of their patience, when they cannot make sense of anything around them and feel burdened by a punishing environment, what they need most is a course of action, an action plan—one that emanates from a deep sense of concern, and one that is backed by foresight and immense mental strength. The articles of this book testify to us that this is exactly what the author had in mind.

May this book inspire a host of concerted intellectual and practical attempts to show the Ummah a way and lead it to its destination. Aameen.

1

Attitude

The Month of Ramadan, Our Attitudes and the COVID Pandemic

At a time when the responsibilities of the Ummah have increased manifold, Allah is making special arrangements for our training. If we spend this Ramadan in its true spirit, this month would turn out to be a revolutionary month, a month of internal renaissance.

This year, the blessed month of Ramadan has dawned upon us in entirely different circumstances. The believers are crestfallen at the sight of locked up *masajid*. The captivating sights of congregational *taraweeh* prayers, masajid brimming with enthusiastic devotees, the sounds of Qur'an recitation reverberating from those masajid all day, the activities surrounding sehri and iftar, the excitement to offer iftar to the fasting believers... these are the heart-warming images of Ramadan that testify to the chaste culture of Islam. Our eyes have been treated to those images year after year. This year, we shall remain deprived of those sights and sounds, and even the quest for *Lailatul Qadr* (night of decree) and the sublime experience of *aitikaaf* would be amiss. It is but natural to feel sad and agonised and bereaved at all this.

Allah tries and tests human beings by putting them in difficult situations. But even when He seems to create difficulties, there is some or the other good hidden in that as well. The Prophet ﷺ has said, "When Allah wishes to grant a favour on someone, He makes him go through difficulties". The approach of a believer should be that of submission, he should be happy with what Allah has willed for him and should try to find out the aspect of favour in that difficulty. Allah has commanded that He be obeyed and worshipped at all times and situations. A believer is expected to obey and worship Him as per the demands of the situation. When stuck up in constrained circumstances, Allah has asked Muslims to offer namaz however they can, and then to proceed with the prescribed method of namaz once the situation gets back to normal.

> "If you fear, pray on foot, or riding (as may be most convenient), but when you are secure, then remember Allah (in prayer) as He has taught you, in the manner you knew not before." [Al-Baqarah: 239]

The beauty of Islam lies in this flexibility. It testifies to the fact that Islam is the religion of the Merciful and Compassionate Allah. This religion puts human life ahead of everything else, tweaking its rules and offering concessions in its commandments in order to protect human life. Islam's guidance in the situation we find ourselves today, thus, is to spend Ramadan in a very cautious manner. We should offer our prayers within the confines of our homes. While doing so, we are obeying divine injunctions no less, and this too has much goodness stored in for us, providing us with ample opportunities to reform ourselves.

Trial, Admonition or Punishment?

These days, everyone seems to be discussing whether this pandemic is a divine punishment, a warning, an admonishment

or a trial. Mufti Muhammad Shafi' رحمه الله has quoted Shah Waliullah Dehlavi رحمه الله as saying that the same crisis can be a punishment for the unrighteous and a trial for the righteous. Whether a crisis is intended to be a trial for us or a punishment can be discerned by a formula suggested by Shah Waliullah. He says that those righteous men on whom descends a crisis as a trial, Allah puts tranquillity in their hearts. They feel contentment in those trials and tribulations in the very same way as a patient accepts bitter pills and surgical procedures on himself, despite the expected discomfort. As for the unrighteous, the punishment that descends upon them makes them apprehensive. Their anxiety knows no bounds, often tripping over to ingratitude, taking them to the verge of apostasy.[1]

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi رحمه الله gives another formula for the same. If a man who is afflicted with a crisis turns to Allah, introspects on his sins and veers towards repentance and penitence, then this suggests that the difficulty he experienced was not a divine punishment or wrath, but rather a gift and favour from Allah. In contrast, when the crisis leads man towards ingratitude, and he becomes more insolent and audacious in sin, then it is suggestive of divine wrath. Hence, the Muslim's perspective, when afflicted by a crisis, is to try his best to get rid of the crisis employing all the resources at his disposal and take all necessary precautions, all the while remaining satisfied and content at divine providence and seeking the goodness therein.

This is a unique and one-of-a-kind Ramadan that Allah has granted us at the most challenging point of our history. The Muslim Ummah is going through its most vulnerable phase, with the seemingly relentless onslaught of challenges and difficulties! The advent of the month of reformation and purification amid all this is indeed part of the divine plan. It is quite possible that Allah

wishes to use this Ramadan to groom Muslims in some distinct manner. Let us use our intellect and wisdom to its farthest extent and try to understand how we can reform ourselves this Ramadan.

Ramadan, Qur'an and Taqwa

Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an. *"Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down, as a guide to mankind, clear proofs of guidance, and criterion."* [Al-Baqarah: 185] Fasting has been made obligatory in this month so as to cultivate taqwa. *"O believers, fasting has been made obligatory upon you, as it had been made obligatory on those before you, that you might perhaps develop taqwa."* [Al-Baqarah: 183]

The Qur'an is the Word of Allah. It provides us with a unique scheme of life. This scheme comprises of a belief system, a value system, a lifestyle that is based on these beliefs and values, a culture and a civilisation. All of man's private and public matters form part of this scheme. This Qur'an-prescribed scheme of life is directed at improving the quality of man's life. It holds the secret to man's success in this world and the Hereafter. In order to make this Qur'anic scheme intrinsic to our lives, it is necessary for us to have self-control, a strong will power to act upon Qur'anic injunctions, God-consciousness, self-discipline and a restrained lifestyle. This is what the Qur'an calls taqwa. Ramadan is meant to cultivate this taqwa. This triad of 'Ramadan-Qur'an-Taqwa' needs to be understood in some detail. Ramadan is a month-long training course. Allah allows Muslims to go through this course every year that they might attain taqwa and adopt the Qur'anic life all year round.

The Qur'an places a lot of importance on taqwa. Allah wants taqwa to form the foundation of a believer's life. The 109th ayah of Surah *Taubah* tells us that the best person is he who erects his life on the foundations of taqwa and His good pleasure. Success

in the Hereafter is also reserved for those who have taqwa: *"The final destination is for those with taqwa."* [Al-Aar'af: 128 and Surah Taha: 132] Even success in this world, the attainment of Allah's bounties and salvation from difficulties are all hinged upon taqwa: *"He who fears Allah (adopts taqwa), He would open up ways for him and grant him sustenance from sources he did not expect."* [At-Talaq: 2, 3]

Allah expects Muslims to leave everything else during the month of the Qur'an and concentrate. They are expected to read the Qur'an, contemplate and ponder over it, to recite it in their homes, to spend their nights in prayer with the Qur'an and listen to it with all earnestness and to, thus, go through the entire Qur'an in this month. They should thereby gain a thorough understanding and recapitulation of the way of life the Qur'an desires of them. The Qur'anic philosophy of life should get embedded in their consciousness. They are expected to introspect vis-à-vis Qur'anic teachings and to check where they deviate from those teachings and in what measure. They should then try to mend their lives accordingly, seeking forgiveness from their Lord. It is for this reason that rewards of Ramadan have been made subject to this condition: "He who stood up for prayers in Ramadan with faith and introspection would have his past sins forgiven."[2]

Next, in order to overcome his shortcomings and to imbibe the virtuous qualities mentioned in the Qur'an, he should work towards developing a strong will power by means of fasting. The entire life of a believer is actually a fast. He is required to rein in his temptations and vain desires all his life in order to please Allah. He is expected to drop his bad habits and keep away from those things that displease Allah. A Muslim is thus expected to observe a light fast all his life, to prepare for which he is made to

go through a month-long rigorous fast every year.

A major part of the Qur'an deals with the rights of other human beings (*Huququl 'Ibaad*). Fasting helps us develop empathy with the poor, deprived, hungry and helpless sections of society. We try to help them out with various forms of charity like *zakat, sadqa, khairat* and *fitra* and experience the sublime ecstasy that follows such selfless acts. This also helps us in developing a soft corner in our hearts for poor people, just as the Qur'an would like us to.

Allah also wants us to nurture a deep bond with Him this month. He wants us to enrich ourselves spiritually by remembering Him, supplicating to Him, reciting from His Book, repenting to Him and turning to Him, so that it would be easier for us to lead a religious life all year long.

As the last ten days of Ramadan dawn upon us, Allah would love to see us getting engrossed in His worship like never before, to get closer to Him by means of *aitikaaf* and by seeking *Lailatul Qadr*, to attain the highest levels of spiritual purity and moral excellence, such that when we reach the Night of Rewards, i.e., the eve of Eid, we should be completely transformed—purged and cleansed into a refreshing new personality which is in sync and alignment with the Qur'an. We are then expected to resume the journey of our lives, having become more pure, pious and religious, to lead lives which agree more with the Qur'an than ever before.

This is the scheme that we understand when we ponder upon the holy triad of 'Ramadan-Taqwa-Qur'an.' Like all other schemes of Islamic worship, this scheme too lays emphasis on the spirit and purpose of worship along with the apparent rites and rituals thereof. Had we concentrated on the spirit and purpose of worship like we concentrate on its rites and rituals,

the Muslim Ummah would have turned out to be an exemplary ideal for the entire world. It would have hoisted itself on such a high moral ground that no other community would have been able to challenge its global leadership. It would have been a source of mercy and beneficence for all mankind.

Ramadan and our Attitudes

It is also germane to note here what form Ramadan has taken in our midst since the past many decades. To the ordinary man, Ramadan has turned into an annual festival. Over the years, the situation has become so grim that spiritual purification and focus of the heart has been overshadowed by ostentatious festivities. The lights and splendour of the bazaars and the fun and excitement of the array of delicacies have dampened the actual 'feel' of Ramadan. We observe hordes of people flocking to taraweeh prayers, but their hearts are at places elsewhere and they are bereft of that God-consciousness and humility that these prayers intend to inculcate. The Qur'an is recited, but it falls on deaf ears, there is no attempt made to ponder over it or to introspect in the light of its passages. Year after year, the month of Ramadan is being treated as an annual ritual, with very few people being able to treat it as a source of self-reformation. Monotony has reduced it to a ritualistic practice.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said:

> "There are many who fast but gain nothing from their fasts except hunger, and there are many who stand up for prayers in the night but gain nothing from it except deprivation of sleep".[3]

Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi رحمه الله had once said:

> "These days, what plagues Muslims is not the bad intention but a lack of intention. Intention (niyyah) is actually the presence of mind."[4]

Niyyah is to keep a tab on the purpose and objective of the act of worship. Niyyah is not simply to recite 'I turn my face to...,' it is to stand on the prayer-mat in all consciousness and presence of mind and heart, telling oneself that I have cut myself off from the world and turned my face to Allah and am at His service. If the heart is bereft of this strong intention then the entire act of worship is reduced to a mere ritual. As there is, of late, an increased awareness in Ummah about religion and worship, it has become necessary to weed out this lack of intention from their midst, to revive the element of spirituality in acts of worship and to ensure that our acts of worship raise us to those moral and spiritual heights that the Qur'an wants us to achieve.

Ramadan 1441 AH

In this background, if we ponder upon the advent of this year's Ramadan in this strange form and delve into the wisdom therein, we arrive at some very important conclusions. As I have mentioned above, the Ummah is going through an extremely vulnerable phase. We are in desperate need of training and grooming. We need to equip ourselves with formidable moral and spiritual strengths to enable us to personify Qur'anic teachings, allowing us to play our roles in making this world a better place to live in. Moreover, this Ramadan is coming in an environment wherein we are witnessing Allah's power and attributes resplendent in all glory all around us. Even atheists and agnostics are turning towards Him. In the midst of all this, Allah has sent us a Ramadan which is completely different from any Ramadan that we have ever seen.

This Ramadan, Muslims are getting an opportunity to break away from ritualistic monotony and to focus on its objective and purpose and spirit as best as we can. This is a Ramadan in which the markets would be shut, restaurants would be closed

and people would not be able to relish all those delicacies. We have been turning Ramadan into a month-long food festival all these years, but that would not be possible this year. Shopping, too, would remain a muted affair. There is no opportunity this year to soak ourselves in the sights and sounds of vibrant bazaars. No feasts this year, and no iftar parties either. What is instead possible is to cut ourselves from the entire world and turn our attention to the Lord of the worlds, to reflect on His signs, His revelation and His attributes. Many of us have been relieved of their busy work routine this time. Those 'working from home' now have a better control over their schedules. The ball is in our court—if we wish, we can spend this Ramadan with complete focus and presence of mind.

Ramadan has a social and collective face, and it also has a personal facade. One part involves rites and rituals, another involves its purpose and spirit. Both are equally important and both complement each other. They come together to complete the act of worship. But it seems as if the collective aspect of Ramadan had gained more prominence in our lives, while its individual and personal aspect was losing lustre. Rites and rituals have become more important, obscuring the spiritual aspect. This year, Allah has granted us an opportunity to correct this imbalance.

How Should We Spend This Ramadan?

Come, let us make this Ramadan the best Ramadan of our lives. Let us make it the turning point of our lives. Let us make it a wonderful means of nurturing real taqwa. We know that the Prophet ﷺ used to spend as much as the entire month of Ramadan in *aitekaaf*, while sometimes twenty days and also the last ten days. While it is true that *aitekaaf* would not be possible this year, it is also true that we are all locked up in our homes. We can very well spend this entire month in an *aitekaaf*-like state—a

state which is difficult, these days, to achieve even in masajid. I am not denying the fact that *aitekaaf* can be observed only in masajid, and that is how it should be. Allah intends us to be in our home this year, then let us think how best to use this opportunity, how we can develop the attentiveness, concentration and focus on worship like we used to during *aitekaaf*. Offering *taraweeh* prayers in a congregation is indeed a *sunnah*, but in the given circumstances we would have to offer these prayers at home. So we need to see how best we can offer these prayers in solitude, with all our concentration and presence of heart and mind. If we are able to offer congregational *taraweeh* prayers towards the end of this Ramadan or the next Ramadan, we would be trained enough to offer the congregational prayers with the same level of concentration and focus insha'Allah, the tempting lights and sounds of the world outside would not be able to distract us. This year, we should enrich ourselves with the spiritual merits of standing for prayers in the wee hours of the night and try to live up to this ayah:

> "And do remember your Lord in your very soul, with humility and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the mornings and evenings, and be not of those who are unheedful. Those who are near to your Lord are not arrogant enough to not worship Him, they exalt Him, and to Him they prostrate." [Al-A'araf: 205 and 206]

We ought to ponder over the Qur'an with all the time and concentration we can muster. It has been reported in Sunan Ibn Majah that a companion of the Prophet ﷺ, while describing the Prophet's prayers, says that he spent an entire night in prayers repeating a single ayah. That ayah was:

> "If You should punish them, indeed they are Your servants, and if You forgive them, then indeed You alone are Powerful and Wise." [Al-Maidah: 118][5]

This spirit of praying in the night, contemplating over Allah's words and connecting with Him, engaging in a dialogue with Him are some sublime things which we can experience this Ramadan in a more focussed manner. We need to work on this. We should try to engage directly with Allah through the Qur'an by reciting it in extended prayer sessions every night. We should make the Qur'an our guide in all walks of life. We should read it, understand it, introspect, recollect each and every sin and mistake we have committed, repent and show remorse with a sincere heart, seek forgiveness from the Merciful and Compassionate Lord, humbly ask Him for the smallest of wants and desires and earnestly pray for our success in this world and the Hereafter.

Some of our brothers and sisters must be reeling under an unforeseen financial crisis amid the lockdown. Even those people who have been blessed with better fortunes must be going through difficulties and distress. We should derive from this as well. One aspect of Ramadan is that it increases the endurance level of Muslims, it trains them to live under constrained circumstances. It brings us out of our comfort zones and teaches us life skills. Allah has made this aspect very prominent this Ramadan, allowing us to become more resilient. We should accept this as part of our training programme and respond accordingly.

Ramadan is the month of compassion and empathy. Every year, we experience hunger and thirst during the fasts. But this year, this experience has become all the more profound, we are seeing thousands of men and women sleeping on empty stomachs and moaning in hunger pangs right before our very eyes. There are so many people who are deprived, helpless, penniless and starved! Allah's bounties abound, but people are being left deprived of those bounties. We thus realise that the torchbearers of Islam still have a lot of work to do to eradicate this injustice and disparity from our society.

Man's true face and colours are revealed in times of difficulty. This Ramadan is dawning upon us at a time when we have come to see this world and humankind in its true form thanks to the pandemic. We have realised that despite all the scientific progress and all the atheist philosophies, human beings still yearn for the truth. There definitely are some sceptical minds who see this crisis as, God forbid, a checkmate to Allah and religion. But a cursory analysis of the speeches and social media posts of people the world over—elite and ordinary—tells us that this crisis has made us realise our weaknesses. It has encouraged us to turn to Allah and to surrender before His might and power. Mankind would surely learn a lot from this great pandemic and its attitude would definitely change in its aftermath. In this backdrop, it is the responsibility of the believers to step up their efforts of conveying the message of the Lord and the Creator of the universe to deprived human beings, to call them towards Allah, towards justice, towards a balanced approach. It is hoped that the post-COVID world would be more receptive to these ideas.

The post-COVID world is the world of more opportunities, more responsibilities and more work. Allah has sought to train us this year by means of a unique Ramadan. We should earnestly try to benefit as much as we can from this training camp and prepare ourselves to shoulder the great responsibilities that await us. As we all know, the initial ayah of Surah Muzzammil were revealed at a time when the Prophet ﷺ was faced with untold challenges in the way of Allah. It was in this context that the Prophet ﷺ was told:

> "Stand to pray by night, but not all night, half of it, or a little less, or a little more, and recite the Qur'an in slow and measured rhythmic tones. Soon shall We send down to you a weighty message. Truly, the rising by night is most effective for concurrence of heart and tongue and most suitable for uttering

words. Truly, there is for you by day prolonged occupation."
[Muzzammil: 2-7]

At a time when the responsibilities of the Ummah have increased manifold, Allah is making special arrangements for our training. If we spend this Ramadan in its true spirit, this month would turn out to be a revolutionary month, a month of internal renaissance. May it indeed be so. *And nothing happens except by the will of Allah, on Him we rely and to Him we turn in repentance.*

(May 2020)

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The Ummah Needs to Focus on its Goal

The Indian Muslim community desperately needs to give meaning to its existence in this country.... Our goal should be the pivot of all our endeavours. If this does happen, our community would hopefully move ahead in perfect harmony and stop getting engrossed in mundane issues and succumbing to a reactionary attitude.

Of the elements which act as prerequisites for the success and achievement of any nation/group of men, the most important is its goal or vision or objective. What this means is that there should be a clear target before us. We should be very certain about our intended destination. All the members of that group should be unanimous about it, and it should be the sole object of their focus. All steps ought to be taken with that goal in view. This goal should decide our direction and *modus operandi.* Strategy and strategic management are important subjects that are taught in contemporary management studies and leadership workshops. An organisation lacking in strategy can never be called a meaningful and mature organisation. Vision and objectives play a central part in strategy. Vision and objectives are a product of one's belief system. If the vision of

an organisation does not confirm to its belief system, then this incongruence comes in the way of its success. Likewise, the core values of an organisation also decide upon the strategy. These values are associated with its beliefs, and they act as a guiding light to the realisation of its objective. It is said that all successful and mature organisations have very defined belief systems, a vision and core values. All these are very intimately related to each other and they govern the organisation.

The vision or objective creates a harmony in our actions and endeavours, and gives them a direction, a meaning, and lends purpose and validation to every step that is taken in its pursuit. It furnishes a definite yardstick to evaluate and introspect. It provides momentum for keeping oneself on his toes and moving ahead. It helps us weed out the mundane from the important. It keeps us from getting entangled and distracted in the hurdles we might face. It equips us with a foresight to achieve long-term goals, insight and depth of understanding, preventing us from succumbing to the narrow mindedness of running after immediate and short-term benefits. It does not allow problems and difficulties to overwhelm us. It keeps our ranks in order, and gives us strong reasons to stay united despite our differences of opinion.

In our view, the most important factor behind the sorry situation of Indian Muslims today is the absolute lack of any clear and vivid goal or vision before them. I shall try to explain below how important it is for us to have a clear vision for the attainment of our success, our triumph and our permanence, and in order to successfully solve the issues at hand. A vision that becomes the dream of every eye, the most cherished desire of every Muslim, a passion for life! It should become the objective of each and every organisation and institute that we have. It should be the goal towards which we all race together, and in doing so we experience

the true meaning of life, its pleasure and passion, one which becomes the blood running through our veins. It should possess us, captivate us, to the point that achieving that goal and the desire to attain that objective should make us forget the temporal world altogether.

The fact remains that in the absence of such a clear and vivid goal, a community remains incomplete and unfounded. It resembles a severed kite that keeps drifting with the wind. If we, as a community, remain devoid of a clear goal and vision, we would not only lose our direction and become worthless, we would also become extremely vulnerable. Qualities like the will to develop, strive and struggle and compete with the world become non-existent. Imagine a football team which has lost the idea of goal. Now all that the members of that team are left to do is to find a safe and comfortable place for themselves or to dispassionately keep kicking the ball here and there. Without a clear goal, if all members of the team keep kicking the ball in line with their will and fancy, they would necessarily have confrontation and confusion at every step. This is but a logical outcome of their vain efforts, as is the fact that such vain efforts would never bear any fruit even if continued for hours together. The same applies to those communities and organisations which are bereft of any clear goal or vision. They seclude themselves in their comfort zones. They get disturbed at the thought of having to struggle. The punishing heat of the battlefield proves too much for their delicate selves to bear. There is always disorder in their ranks, and whatever they do, ultimately turn futile and meaningless.

The Qur'anic Guidance

At several places, the Qur'an makes it clear that a proper goal is imperative for the Muslims to attain success and that their belief system should be strong. An important sign of this belief is

that striving and struggling in the Way of Allah ought to become their very *raison d'être*. The Qur'an lists down strong faith as the most important requirement not only for salvation in the Hereafter, but also for success, peace and security in this world.

The Qur'an is very explicit in stating that the political success of Muslims is tied down to their faith.

> "Do not lose heart and do not fall into despair, you will be superior if you are true in faith." [Aale 'Imran: 139]

Similarly, it has been said that the secret to economic prosperity also lies in strengthening one's faith and in fulfilling its requirements, i.e., being pious and God-conscious.

> "If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them all kinds of blessings from the heaven and the earth." [Al-A'araf: 96]

Or we have Prophet Nuh ﷺ assuring his people on God's behalf that if they were to turn to Allah,

> "He will send rain to you in abundance, give you increase in wealth and sons, and bestow on you gardens and rivers of flowing water." [Nuh: 11-12]

For the Muslims, even their peace and security is hinged upon their faith and good deeds.

> "Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and perform righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them, that He will establish in authority their deen—the one which He has chosen for them, and that He will change their state, after the fear in which they have lived, to one of security and peace." [An-Nur: 55]

The Qur'an has also made it clear that any weakness in faith and neglect towards the Almighty would invite loss and

hopelessness.

> "Whoever turns away from My remembrance would indeed have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind." [Taha: 124]

The Qur'an presents many historical events to testify to this principle.

> "Allah presents an example of a city which was safe and secure, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place. Yet, it was ungrateful for the favours of Allah. So Allah made it taste of hunger and fear closing in on it like a garment from every side because of what they had been doing." [An-Nahl: 112]

Every strong belief system necessarily gives rise to a definite purpose in life. When man's belief in Allah, His scriptures and His Messengers ripens to conviction, then the teachings of Allah and His Messenger also equip him with a vision to reform the world from its pitiable condition. A strong faith allows us to focus entirely on that vision and goal. It is for this reason that the Qur'an, at several places, supplements good deeds with striving in the cause of Allah in pursuit of the goal and vision that Islam has given its followers as an essential outcome of faith. In many an instance striving in the Way of Allah is enlisted as an important sign of being a believer in Allah.

> "Only those are believers who have believed in Allah and His Messenger, and have never since doubted, but have striven with their belongings and their persons in the Cause of Allah, such are the sincere ones." [Al-Hujurat: 15]

The Example of Prophet Ibrahim

The Holy Qur'an tells us that the life of Prophet Ibrahim is an exemplary model for the believers to follow.

> "There is for you an excellent example in Ibrahim and those with him." [Al-Mumtahana: 4]

Prophet Ibrahim's most distinguishing quality was his focus and dedication to his cause. The Qur'an describes him as a *Haneef* (completely devoted and focussed) person [Aale 'Imran: 67]. He had turned away from everything else to concentrate on the Almighty [Al-An'am: 79]. Elaborating upon his focussed attitude, the Qur'an explains that Prophet Ibrahim had dedicated his entire life to God. All his acts of worship were for Allah alone, he lived for Allah and was ready to die for Him. Allah, and the mission He had entrusted him with, were all that he ever cared for. [Al-An'am: 16]

Ibrahim's mission was to proclaim *tauheed.* He had endured all kinds of trials and tribulations in his homeland in the service of this cause, and it is for this cause that he left his home and migrated to Egypt, Transjordan, Palestine and Hijaz, making them the centres of his teaching. He made his family members settle in those places. He prayed to Allah to grant him a son who would continue with his mission after him. He even agreed to leave behind his wife and infant son, Ismail, in the barren desert. He constructed the House of Allah and the Centre of *tauheed.* He also showed his willingness to sacrifice his only son in the way of Allah. And after a lifetime of relentless struggle, when he was finally on his deathbed, his only desire was to have an entire nation or community in his lineage to continue with his mission. [Al-Baqarah: 128]

The example of Prophet Ibrahim that, thus, comes before us is that of a true believer and focussed servant of Allah who had complete faith in pure *tauheed.* Calling people towards Allah was the object of his life, it was the focus of all his attention, interests and endeavours.

Muslims have been told that they, too, should be focussed on their mission like Prophet Ibrahim was.

> "Who can be better in deen (way of life) than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good deeds and follows the way of Ibrahim, the true in faith? For Allah did take Ibrahim for a friend." [An-Nisa': 125]

Focus on our Goal: The Real Strength

The Qur'an also tells us that faith grants us stability in both worlds.

> "Allah keeps firm those who believe, with the firm word in worldly life and in the Hereafter. And Allah sends astray the wrongdoers. And Allah does what He wills." [Ibrahim: 27]

This tells us that faith and conviction is a strength in itself, as opposed to hypocrisy and opportunism, which is a weakness. Faith allows individuals and communities to focus on their goals. Their mental and physical strengths get concentrated, and this concentration makes their each strength more effective. Agnosticism, hypocrisy and ambivalence, on the other hand, are weaknesses, they plunge our subconscious into confusion and break away our strengths, leaving us bereft of any momentum or drive.

Of late, various experiments have been conducted under quite a few disciplines, and they all prove that faith and conviction do possess this innate strength. The *Pygmalion effect* is a very important theory in educational psychology. It says that if the student is made to believe that he can perform better, his performance level improves drastically. And if the teacher comes to believe that a certain student is more intelligent than others, then this belief has a positive effect on that student, and his performance improves in an amazing manner. Likewise, we have the *placebo effect*, which is used extensively in medical practice. Even if the patient is offered sugar tablets—and he is convinced that these tablets would cure him—it often so happens that he

regains his health by taking those tablets which otherwise have no pharmaceutical value *per se.*

This discussion brings to light the cause of our weakness. If we believe in Islam, and at the same time get influenced by ideas contrary to Islam as well, or if we testify to Islam being the truth, and yet are in two minds about its viability in today's world, or if we claim to follow Islam, but our approach and practice tell another story, or if our goal and vision are not the same as that espoused by Islam, then all this Janus-faced incoherence renders us weak. This weakness creates hurdles in the path of progress in every conceivable field. This weakness of faith not only weakens our prospects in the Hereafter, it also comes in the way of our worldly interests. It mars the collective psychology of the Ummah, eventually taking a toll on the individual as well. Consequently, we lag behind in education and academics, our economic activities turn fruitless, we become politically irrelevant and finally turn into a weak and feeble group—sitting ducks to oppression and exploitation.

The intellectuals of Islamic movements have always warned us that Islamic society can never progress by accepting Western ideas and thought. For Western society, materialistic secularism has become their religion and way of life. They have complete faith and conviction in it, and this belief system (no matter how misguided or baseless) has become their strength. But if you import those alien concepts and ideas into Islamic society and impose them on the belief system of Muslims despite being mutually contradictory, they would never feel at ease with anything that they do.

As Ghalib says:

Iman mujhe roke hai to kheenche hai mujhe kufr
Kaaba mere peechhe hai kaleesa mere aage.

> Faith restrains me while I am tugged at by disbelief, behind my stands the Kaaba, the church is in front of me.

This attitude gives rise to hypocrisy and decline. These are very big weaknesses on the collective level, nay, they are the fountainhead of all weaknesses. Any nation that believes in the Western concept of nationalism can develop by stipulating national development and national glory as its target. But the belief system of Muslims tells them that they are not a mere community or nation, but the torchbearers of a deen. Shallow targets like national development can never find compatibility with their belief system, making it impossible for those ideas to ever translate into their actual goal and vision.

Focus on the Goal and Vision, and the Hardships of Life

Focus on one's goal and cause keeps individuals and groups from getting entangled in short-term issues and problems or getting tensed by them. When our eyes are set on our target, the minor hurdles along the way become irrelevant. A traveller who takes the long road with his destination before him does not get distracted by the discomforts, obstacles, potholes and boulders he encounters on his path. The most he does is to avoid and overcome them in order to continue with his journey. He concentrates on his destination, and not the road that leads to it. If he is required to take the difficult and tortuous road to reach his destination, he would still take it without batting an eyelid. On the contrary, when our journey is without a purpose or destination—as is the case when we go for a leisurely stroll, then even the most insignificant of things on the road grabs our attention, every flower and every thorn makes itself visible to us. The road itself becomes the centre of our attention and interest. We get upset if the road is uneven, and we seek a road which is plain and levelled. This implies that if we are getting affected by the problems of path our journey is

unimportant, purposeless and without a destination.

In order to explain the importance of having a purpose, a goal and a meaningful life, people often cite the example of an Austrian Jew named Victor Frankl, who is a holocaust survivor, doctor and neurologist. Victor Frankl and his entire family had been taken inmates at a Nazi concentration camp. His parents, brother and beloved wife died of the extreme hunger, cold and torture. His entire career's scientific research papers were confiscated from him. He was also subjected to immense torture, but he endured them all with courage and determination. In concentration camp, he witnessed the many ways in which various people were responding to the torture. There were some who quickly lost all hope and preferred death over life. But there were some others who showed exemplary courage in standing up to the torture meted out to them. He began studying the attitude of each of these groups in the light of his knowledge and experience in the field of neurology and psychology. His observations and experiences led him to the postulation of the third most important theory in psychology.

According to Sigmund Freud, the 'will to pleasure' is the most potent motivation in life. Alfred Adler contends that it is the 'will to power.' But Frankl differed with them both and proposed that the actual motivation in life is the 'will to meaning.' It is on the basis of this theory that he came up with an important treatment module in psychology called 'logo therapy.' He avers that if human life is left without a meaning, every small matter makes life complicated. On the contrary, meaning (i.e., the goal and purpose of life) equips man with a desire to stay alive and strive and struggle, it gives him a strong motivation to work and perform, a momentum for progress, and an incredible and extraordinary resolve to face the adversities of life. Frankl's book, *Man's Search of Meaning*, is one of the most renowned

and influential books in the world. Millions of copies have been published in several languages. He based his theory on the famous words spoken by Friedrich Nietzsche, "He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how". Issues and problems become fetters of our feet when our life does not have a 'why to live,' a higher purpose. We often observe in our everyday life that when people retire from duty and they have got nothing left to do in life, their health begins to deteriorate quite quickly. In contrast, those elderly men and women who make their lives meaningful and busy themselves with some important and beneficial activity even in that ripe age remain happy and healthy. Just as this applies to individuals, it also holds true for nations. In the absence of any collective goal and vision, our collective existence becomes meaningless and fragile. Strength and power, progress, success and glory can only be possible if we have a higher collective vision before our eyes.

The Condition of Indian Muslims

What should be the goal and objective of Muslims? The teachings of the Qur'an and *hadith* are so explicit in this regard that there is no scope left for ambiguity. *Tehreek-e-Islami* has made *Iqamat-e-Deen* (the establishment of deen) its goal and objective. This is indeed the actual and ultimate goal of the entire Ummah. There are certain sections of the Ummah who have their own opinion about this term and its implications. But the actual position of Muslims is that of one's calling people towards Allah, and there is no difference of opinion in at least this regard, nor can there ever be. In this position, their actual task and vision is to communicate Islam. Moreover, there is near complete consensus about the following implications it holds:

- ❑ To convey the message of Allah to His servants: The Muslims of this country are ambassadors of Islam here. They are required to acquaint their fellow countrymen with the

message of Islam and discharge their duty of communicating the message of Allah, i.e., Islam.

- ❑ To make our society an ideal Islamic society: They need to focus on the reformation and grooming of their own selves and their society in such a manner that it becomes an ideal Islamic society, and their personal and public role and attitude become a practical example and testimonial of Islam.
- ❑ To develop social power: They need to progress academically, socially and economically. This would purge away their weaknesses and raise them to an influential position.
- ❑ To selflessly serve people and win over their hearts: They are supposed to selflessly serve humanity and allow their collective attitude to testify to the compassionate nature of Islam. They are supposed to be the torchbearers of truth and justice, the hope of the weak and downtrodden, to the point that they are identified as the true empathisers of humanity.

The reason why I am not appending these points with supportive arguments and references from the Qur'an and *hadith* is that there is near consensus over these points. The scholars of all schools of thought and creed speak on these points in almost all their lectures. But despite all this, the sorry fact remains that these points are yet to assume the status of the Indian Muslim's real goal. Their lectures and sermons are replete with expositions on *'Khair-e-Ummat'* and *'Dawat-e-Deen,'* but these could not take the shape of our collective vision and target on which the overwhelming majority of the Ummah could focus its attention.

Post-independence, a major part of our collective efforts have been expended in securing our life and property and in standing up to the enemies of Islam and defending our faith. Muslim politics also revolved around these very issues, giving rise to a fairly defensive mentality. However, a defensive and reactionary

mentality can never come up with constructive and productive ideas. As a result, we are always pulled down by our immediate concerns, making it difficult for us to raise our heads and look up to the future. We become so distracted with the hurdles on our path that the destination itself gets obscured. We end up falling prey to a reactionary attitude, and showing fortitude in a long-term struggle with a proactive and positive agenda becomes practically impossible. It is our enemies, and not us, who then set our agenda. They raise a slogan, and we raise a counter-slogan. They plot and plan, and we adopt reactionary measures. All our collective strengths and resources are thus exhausted in trying to escape and secure ourselves from the traps they lay for us. Despair, fear and depression, stagnation and hopelessness are the essential features of this defensive attitude. If our eyes are not set on our destination, the smallest of obstacles on the way appear as huge insurmountable mountains, and they so overwhelm us that getting rid of them becomes our sole objective in life. Accordingly, someone lets out an issue and everyone from senior intellectuals and leaders to students active on social media get busy with it for months on end. Some others feel that lamenting upon lynching incidents and cursing the perpetrators of these crimes is the greatest service to the community, while someone else would feel that some other stray issue ought to be the lone agenda of the Muslim community. Be it the fiery speeches of our leaders or the writings of our intellectuals, be it our journalism or the deluge of posts on social media, this is the only thing we witness all around us. We never find the mention of any long-term plan or definite vision. These distractions are a sign that the community has lost sight of its actual goal and objective. I am not trying to water down the aforementioned issues, nor is it my intention to do so. But we should give them only as much

importance as they deserve—that of an immediate concern. We should definitely adopt all possible means to solve those issues, but we should never allow these small issues to become the primary interest of our lives and the centre of our attention at any point. It does not behove this glorious and mighty Ummah to expend all its time and effort in defending its citizenship or tallow incidents like those of lynching to overpower its collective psyche or that its intellectuals and thinkers are left with no other work but to lament upon the backwardness of the Ummah.

We read about road accidents and fatalities every day. Whenever we drive our car, there is always a possibility of meeting with an accident. But if this keeps lingering in our minds while driving, then we would never be able to drive peacefully. Whenever we are on the road, we should no doubt take all necessary precautions to avoid an accident and drive very carefully, but our mind should be focussed on our destination. Just as getting engrossed in the minor obstacles on the road keeps us away from reaching our destination, the real and imagined phobia of accidents makes us incapable of driving down the road.

A section of intellectuals advocates the need to focus on education and economic progress. First of all, it is debatable whether mere academic and economic progress can ever be the *raison d'être* of any nation or community. As we have mentioned earlier, we need something to drive us towards academic and economic progress too. This driving force can be provided by none other than a higher vision and goal that is shared by the entire community, and this vision and goal needs to be in conformity with the Muslims' faith and belief system. A person pursues education and sweats his brow earning money for his own prosperity and that of his family. Unless a nation or

community has a collective object or target, it would never aim at economic growth and educational excellence, would it?

The Indian Muslim community desperately needs to give meaning to its existence in this country. The Muslims here need to believe in their status as the ambassadors of Islam, and that they need to spend their lives in the pursuit of a goal, a cause, and a vision. They need to make *Dawat-e-deen* (communicating Allah's message) and the aforementioned four points their vision, and collectively focus upon it. Our goal should be the pivot of all our endeavours. If this does happen, our community would hopefully move ahead in perfect harmony and with complete focus, unity and amity. It would stop getting engrossed in mundane issues and minor obstacles and stop succumbing to a reactionary attitude. All this would, of course, be possible with the will and wish of God Almighty alone.

(December 2019)

Self-Confidence and Conviction The Need of the Hour

In the present circumstances, it is all the more required for [Muslims] to remain firm and resolute on [their] principles without falling prey to hopelessness and despair. We need to keep on with our primary task, i.e., dawah with total concentration, while our collective attitude should be a personification of sabr, tawakkul and taubah.

These days, given the situation that Indian Muslims find themselves entangled in, the one thing they need the most is faith. Faith should blossom in their hearts, and this faith should instil hope, self-confidence and a strong belief in actions, efforts and strengths. This faith should encourage them to alter the prevailing situation. But what we see right now is that a section of intellectuals and writers have embarked upon a mission to spread fear, panic, self-reproach, dejection and hopelessness among the Muslims. Exaggerated and at times false and baseless reporting of news and events, dissemination of unreasonable apprehensions and paranoia about the future, castigating and holding the Ummah guilty on every count and an attempt to portray the entire world our enemy are some defining points of this school. The fast and unrestricted

medium of social media has made the quick dispersion of these ideas and their effects quite easy and convenient. A few days back news broke out that the government has announced the implementation of national register of citizens (NRC), and the citizenship of only that person would be acknowledged who can furnish documents to prove that his ancestors have been Indian citizens since 1951. This news spread a chilling wave of fear throughout the country. An army of so-called intellectuals leapt into the ring. Some person received a gazette notification of the Population Register and took it as a 'documented evidence' of the aforementioned 'news.' Some other person stumbled upon the list of documents that were required for the Assam NRC, he went ahead and claimed that this was the very list of documents which would be required for the nationwide NRC. It did not take more than a few hours for these manipulated half-truths to gain currency all over the country. News of lynching incidents were reported in such a manner that it seemed as if no Muslim is secure in any corner of the country. One person wrote that he is afraid to drive down the streets of Delhi for fear of getting lynched. A day after another random person was taunted while travelling by train, he took to social media and wrote that 'I was almost lynched yesterday, and was saved by a whisker.' It came to be claimed by all and sundry that the majority community of this country has completely turned communal and Islamophobic, that those who portray themselves as 'secular' are also closeted with the fascists, that the Muslims of this country have been left with no one to empathise with them, that even their own leaders and organisations do not sympathise with them, nor do they sympathise with their own selves. This can very well be a means of conveying our protests and an expression of hurt and anger against the situation prevailing in the country. But since these

concerns are carried only by Urdu newspapers and the social media bubble of Muslims alone, all they lead to is the spread of fear and despair.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: What are we going to achieve by spreading all this fear and despair? Which of our problems would it solve? The anti-Islam and anti-Muslim elements want just that—that the Muslims should lose hope and fall into despair. Hopelessness and despair are the worst things that can ever befall any community. Hardships are but fleeting, but if dejection and fear become widespread, the effects of these hardships linger on for a very long time. This fear psychosis robs away the spirit of life. It shatters one's self-confidence. It destroys the will and resolve to move forward and progress. If this feeling of dejection and fear looms large, leave alone social and political activism, even economic and academic progress lose momentum. Just as for the individual, hope and confidence are major sources of strength and momentum for groups and communities as well. As long as the flame of hope keeps burning, even the biggest of failures and the worst of catastrophes cannot break the back of any community. They keep the sparks of hope alive even in ashes, and when the right time comes, even the slightest whiff of positive change fans these sparks into raging fires. In sharp contrast, if the strings of hope and faith are let off, even shadows and whispers can strike terror in one's heart. Enemies are not required to destroy such communities, they succumb to their own apprehensions and fears and wither away.

Islamic Teachings and Dire Circumstances

Islam and its teachings are antithetical to fright and despair. Faith in Allah and a conviction in His attributes never allow a believer to fall into despair or dejection.

"And never give up hope of Allah's soothing mercy, truly, no

one despairs of Allah's soothing mercy except those who have no faith." [Yusuf: 87]

How much Allah dislike dejection and despair can be gauged from this ayah of the Qur'an:

"Whoever should think that Allah would not support him in this world and the Hereafter, let him extend a rope to the sky and cut out a hole therein. Then let him see whether this plan of his will remove that which enrages him." [Al-Hajj: 15]

While expounding upon this, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad writes (although his interpretation of the ayah differs from the translation we have used here, it is still worth pondering upon):

"He who opts for despair instead of holding on to hope and faith, whether it is regarding the life of this world or that of the Hereafter, he should keep in mind that now he has no right to remain alive. The only option left for such a person is to tie a noose around his neck and end his life. *Subhan Allah*! This single ayah has solved all the problems of human life. Life is nothing but hope and struggle. Death is despair and giving up. So, if an ignoble person decides that Allah has nothing to offer him in this world and the Hereafter, then what is it that is left for him? What is it that would keep him alive? And why should he remain alive at all?

But no, faith is another word for hope. And it is the sign of a believer that he can never fall into despair. His mental temperament can never abhor anything as much as despair. No matter how many failures he might face in this life, he would gather himself up and make a fresh attempt. No matter how much he is submerged in sins and faults, he would repent yet again. He can neither despair of success in this world, nor of salvation in the Hereafter. He knows all too well that despair in this life is akin to death, and despair in the Hereafter is endless. He looks up to Allah's mercy in both worlds and believes in His bounties."[1]

At several places, the Qur'an makes it clear that the hardships the believers face are not without a purpose. They have their own objectives. They are a part of God's divine plan. If not for God's permission and will, nobody in this world can cause us any harm whatsoever.

> "If Allah should touch you with adversity, none can remove it but Him. And if He intends for you good, none can keep back His favour. He causes it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleases. And He is the Forgiving, the Merciful." [Yunus: 107]

The Qur'an tells us that there are four possible reasons why we encounter hardships and adversities:

1. Hardships and disasters can be because of our sins.

> "Whatever disaster strikes you, it is because of what your hands have earned, but He pardons much." [Ash'Shura: 30]

2. It can be a warning and admonition from Allah.

> "Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice? Yet they do not turn in repentance nor do they take heed." [*Taubah*: 126]

> "We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity in order that they might turn to Us." [Al-Aa'raf: 168]

3. One important purpose of hardships and adversities is to test and evaluate the believers.

> "Such days of varying fortunes We alternate among the people so that Allah may make evident those who believe and may take to himself from among you witnesses to the truth." [Aale 'Imran: 140]

4. These hardships and adversities may be part of God's greater scheme and the harbingers of some greater good.

> "Perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not." [Al-Baqarah: 216]

> "Verily my Lord understands best the mysteries of all that He plans to do, for verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom." [Yusuf: 100]

Allah made the dark and terrifying confines of the well in which Prophet Yusuf ﷺ was thrown, his first step towards the Egyptian throne. He made his protracted stay in the dungeons his second step. Likewise, all throughout history, Allah, Wise and Omniscient, has often made some severe crises the gateway to that nation's unexpected success. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had said that the ones who have received the largest share of adversities were the ones who were closest to Allah and His most honoured servants, i.e., His blessed Prophets and Messengers.

> Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas ﷺ narrates that I enquired, "O Messenger of Allah! Who are the ones who are tormented the most? He ﷺ replied, "The Prophets and Messengers of Allah, followed by those who are closest to them in rank, followed by those who are next in rank. A person is tested in accordance with his religiosity. If a person is strict with his religion, then his trials are also strict. And if he is lackadaisical with his religion, then his trials are also of the same nature. These hardships always accompany man, to the point that he walks upon the earth without any sin remaining attached to him."[2]

Hence, the believers neither get afraid of adversities, nor do they fall into despair or dejection. Instead, they keep in mind the four aforementioned reasons and determine their response accordingly. They introspect upon their faults and weaknesses with an unprejudiced lens, and seek forgiveness from Allah, repenting to Him in all sincerity. They acknowledge Allah's warnings and turn towards their responsibilities. They stand

firm by their principles and try to pass this examination with flying colours. They try their best to rectify the situation at hand by adopting all possible resources and seek Allah's help while facing the hardships with all determination and courage. In doing so, they keep their eyes focussed on their ultimate goal and raison d'être.

The Current Situation: Putting It into Perspective

It cannot be denied that the situation of our country is indeed alarming when seen from certain angles. But these conditions need to be seen in their proper perspective. It is also necessary to ponder over the underlying causes and reasons that have led to the development of these conditions and to adopt proper measures to counter them. To indulge in a false and extreme interpretation of the prevailing situation, and to overwhelm ourselves with doubts and apprehensions relying on these interpretations, and to then create an environment of fear and restlessness and despair in the entire community can never be justified.

The most disturbing aspect of the situation at hand is that negative feelings against Islam and Muslims are building up among our countrymen at an unprecedented pace. But this does not mean that all our countrymen have turned communal. Drawing such conclusions is not only a deviation from truth, it is also an insult to those millions of righteous individuals who have been fighting communal forces with far more courage and determination than Muslims are. Muslims, even today, are residing with non-Muslims in every part of the country. They work with them, trade with them, share each other's joys and sorrows. Be it during our journeys, or in our offices and colonies, heart-warming scenes of friendship and humanity, of sacrificing for each other, are not in the least on the decline. The conditions

might differ from state to state, but our own experience tells us that there is no such situation in the country which warrants the entire society to be branded 'xenophobic' or 'communal.'

It is true that communalism is flourishing and growing with every passing day. It is not uncommon in our country for communities to develop grievances against each other or even fight each other. But an environment of persistent animosity and hatred is certainly an unfamiliar phenomenon for most parts of the country. And this phenomenon is escalating, it is on the rise! It is becoming increasingly common, especially among the young generation, to see each and every event from a purely communal angle. Never before have someone's dietary habits been questioned in our country, but they are being questioned now. Practically, every person used to respect the hijab, but demands are now being raised to ban it. Episodes of extremism, which were hitherto limited to communal tensions alone, can now be witnessed in normal circumstances too. This abrupt change in the situation does call for our urgent attention and expeditious attempts to rectify the same, but there is no reason why anyone should feel hopeless about it. These conditions can be changed, provided we channelise our attempts in the right direction.

The second alarming aspect of the situation at hand is the predominantly despotic and fascist regime that governs us. A ruthless dilapidation of democratic institutions and traditions, abject neglect towards the citizens' human rights, exploitation of the law and an attempt to silence every dissenting voice with money, brute force and threats are some of the most sordid features of the picture that has emerged over the past few months. The relentless defamatory attacks on Muslims and Islamic symbols and the indifference shown towards them seek to plunge the Muslims into a sense of inferiority complex, fear, impulsiveness and exasperation. It is feared that such episodes would only grow in severity in the future. But this problem of

governance is nothing but an outcome of the first problem, namely, the proliferation of communalism in society.

There are many factors involved in the political success of these communal elements. Racism has assumed pandemic proportions. All over the world, owing to a number of reasons, racist and communal powers are gaining mass appeal. Islamophobia, in particular, is spreading all over the planet. One important reason behind this is the rise of Islam as an ideological rival. Closer home, the decline of the Congress and socialist parties has also contributed to this phenomenon. The ideological appeal of these political movements began losing their sheen with the passage of time. Owing to a deluge of corruption and dynastic and opportunistic politics, they have been rendered incapable of holding on to their position as an effective ideological power on the social canvas. Consequently, corporate bigwigs too began seeing these secular parties as a liability, they inched towards the right-wing and threw their weight behind them. In this age of global capitalism, this proved to be a major game changer. Given these developments, the social and political communal forces which had been toiling hard in a disciplined and systematic manner all these years grabbed this golden opportunity with both hands, employing all the cunningness and tact at their disposal.

But despite all this, the fact remains that even today, the social foundations of fascism and fascist ideologies are quite shaky. A change in the conditions and the rise of an alternative ideological and social trends can quickly undermine their roots. We should never forget that extremist public opinions and oppression and tyranny are always short lived. This is all the more true in our country's case, where the possibility of this situation continuing for long is but meagre. Eventually, sooner or later, their drawbacks would become obvious, and the country's public opinion would hopefully turn against them. But it is evident that this change would not occur on its own. We cannot just sit and hope for things to change for the better. We need to plan and make efforts. In order to adopt all these measures and continue

with our efforts in the right direction, it is necessary to rectify our collective psychology.

Collective Psychological Health

The Qur'an speaks of qualities that the Muslims need to imbibe within themselves in order to attain success. Apart from faith and good deeds, it also lists *sabr* (patience, forbearance, steadfastness), *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) and *taubah* (repentance) as indispensable ones. Thus, *sabr, tawakkul* and *taubah* are the three elements vital to a Muslim's psychological health. In the present circumstances, it is all the more required for us to remain firm and resolute on our principles without falling prey to hopelessness and despair. We need to keep on with our primary task, i.e., *dawah* with total concentration, while our collective attitude should be a personification of *sabr, tawakkul* and *taubah.*

Sabr

The Qur'an speaks of *sabr* as an important prerequisite for success and triumph.

> "And We made a people, who had been oppressed, inheritors of lands in both east and west lands whereon We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because they had *sabr.* And We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected (with much pride)." [Al-A'araf: 137]

What is *sabr*? *Sabr* does not mean cowardice, nor does it imply unilaterally giving up one's struggle and fight. *Sabr* is to stand up to negative emotions like fear, despair, hopelessness, impulsiveness, anger and fury, temptations and the lure of wealth and luxuries with our values and principles and to remain steadfast to our actual cause. *Sabr* is to have complete control over ourselves, and to ensure that no step of ours is taken without a conscious resolve. If a community can very easily be provoked, and it then ends up doing something stupid under the influence

of this provocation, this would be regarded as a collective lack of *sabr*. Likewise, if a community easily succumbs to fear and anxiety, and if this fear compels them to forsake those measures that it regards as appropriate and essential in all earnest, this too is a lack of *sabr*, which alludes to the overwhelming influence of negative emotions on one's consciousness. Impulsiveness is also a negative emotion, being overtly emotional is also a negative emotion, fear and cowardice are also negative emotions. Making a conscious effort to keep these emotions in check is what *sabr* actually is. If the entire community develops this quality, it becomes a force to reckon with.

Today, we need to inculcate within ourselves the ability to foil—with *sabr* and determination—all those attempts that are being made to provoke us, to make us fall into despair, to make us lose confidence and to instil within us a sense of fear and hopelessness.

Tawakkul

Another important factor that serves as a prerequisite in obtaining Allah's help and support is *tawakkul*.

> "And he who fears Allah, He would make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever has tawakkul (relies) upon Allah—then He is sufficient from him. Indeed, Allah would accomplish His purpose." [Talaq: 2-3]

Tawakkul entails that man should adopt all possible measures to achieve his objective and then rely upon Allah, put his faith in Him. Abandoning all efforts and simply counting upon Allah is not *tawakkul*. It has been mentioned in a *hadith* that a person approached the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, pointed towards his camel and asked, "O Messenger of Allah! Should I tie up the reins of the camel and have *tawakkul*, or should I leave it free and

have *tawakkul*?" He replied, "Tie it up and then have *tawakkul*." [3]

What this means is that we should take all necessary steps and then rely upon Allah.

Similarly, surrounding oneself with fears and anxieties despite adopting all possible measures is also against *tawakkul*. We should expend all our efforts in doing whatever is within our scope of action, and to leave to Allah what is beyond our scope of action, reposing our trust in Him. *Tawakkul* allows individuals and nations to focus on possibilities. To fall prey to worries and anxieties about those things which are beyond our scope, to cry over spilt milk, and to waste one's efforts over apprehensions is the hallmark of weak individuals and nations. Successful people, on the contrary, keep their eyes focussed on their mission. They always concentrate on expending their efforts on those possibilities which lie within their scope of action, they do not waste their time thinking about those things that lie beyond their scope. This is the very spirit that *tawakkul* inculcates within us. This is a unique paradigm of thought. This paradigm makes individuals and communities pragmatic and optimistic. We need this pragmatism today. If our mental and physical strengths get focussed on those tasks which are within the realm of possibilities, and which promise to bring about a positive change, then we can very well bring about a revolution even today.

Taubah

The Qur'an enlists *taubah* too as a prerequisite for attaining success.

> "O my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord and turn to Him in *taubah* (repentance). He will send you the skies pouring abundant rain and add strength to your strength." [Hud: 52]

In collective life, *taubah* refers to the ability to change oneself. Of the many collective qualities required for success, one important quality is to keep introspecting regularly. And when we notice any deficiency within ourselves, we should not find

it difficult to change ourselves. Decline and weakness makes a nation succumb to stagnation. They develop a strong resistance to change within themselves. Even when they realise they have weaknesses, and even when they understand the changes that are required for self-rectification, it still becomes practically impossible for them to adopt the required changes. This status quoist attitude is a severe impediment, it renders the nation inept at satisfying the demands of the age. The Holy Qur'an describes believers as those who turn to Allah and repent. Those who do not turn to Him have been called unjust.

> "Whoever does not repent—it is those who are the unjust." [Al-Hujurat: 11]

The literal meaning of *taubah* is to turn back. If individuals and nations possess the ability to change themselves quickly, to break the status quo, to swiftly adopt the changes that they believe are earnestly required in all consciousness, this would be one of their greatest assets.

It is the need of the hour for us, our society, our institutions, our leadership, our groups and organisations to be willing to practically adopt the changes that we see necessary for ourselves. This process of change should be quick, so that we might equip ourselves with the ability to reform the conditions at hand at the earliest.

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Sabr*: An Essential Element of Ummah's Approach

Individuals and communities often choose a wrong path when they are overwhelmed by emotions. The command of intellect and deen over emotions is sabr, while losing command over emotions leads to being impulsive and impatient. Sabr entails that everything that one does should be rooted in the call of reason and intellect and the understanding and wisdom derived from the deen.

In almost every chapter of the book that you hold in your hands, the primary questions that keep surfacing are: What is the key to the success and development of Indian Muslims? How can they overcome the issues and challenges they face? How can they fulfil their responsibilities?

Of the qualities that the Qur'an lists down as prerequisites to the rise and success of a community, one important quality is *sabr*. Quite unfortunately, *sabr* has been misinterpreted as 'unilaterally giving up resistance and struggle.' This is the reason

* *Sabr* is usually translated as 'patience' in English. But I have deliberately avoided this translation because *sabr* is much more profound a subject. Hence, I have retained the original Arabic word throughout this piece.—*Translator*

why some people call it an attribute of the coward! In this chapter, we shall not only discuss the importance of *sabr* in a community's affairs, but also elaborate upon its true import. We shall also try to explain what role *sabr* should play in the strategy of the Ummah and in determining its approach, and delineate those elements which currently go against the spirit of *sabr*.

The Importance of Sabr in a Community's Story

The Holy Qur'an talks of *sabr* as one of the most important attributes of a believer. It stands out among those qualities that are required to succeed in the Hereafter. Surah Al-'Asr has been recognised as the most comprehensive concise Surah of the Qur'an. The four prerequisites that this Surah lists down to save oneself from eternal doom include adopting *sabr* and enjoining others to adopt *sabr* as an important condition. In several passages of the Qur'an, we have been told that *sabr* is not only essential to succeed in the Hereafter, but it is also required to succeed in this world. Citing an episode from the history of the Bani Israel, the Qur'an explains how a small band of righteous men can rise to dominance over an evil and oppressive community. In the following ayah, the Qur'an explains the factors that tilted the balance in favour of the Israelites:

> "And We made a people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in the east and the west—lands on which We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of thy Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because they exercised *sabr*. And We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected with such pride." [Al-A'araf: 137]

This ayah tells us that victory and leadership in this world are offered to those who possess the quality of *sabr*. When engaged in a fierce battle with the enemy, the believers are

instructed thus:

> "O you who believe, take to *sabr* and steadfastness, and remain stationed, and fear Allah, that you may be successful." [Aale'Imran: 200]

If a powerful enemy is playing all sorts of tricks, we have been told that such conspiracies can only be confronted with *sabr*, if you exercise *sabr*, you would be able to foil the greatest of plots.

> "And if you exercise *sabr* and taqwa, their plot will not harm you at all." [Aale'Imran: 120].

After a prolonged phase of trials and tribulations, when Prophet Yusuf ﷺ eventually ascended the throne of Egypt, he told his brothers that *sabr* is one of those factors that have contributed to his success.

> "Indeed, he who exercises taqwa and *sabr*, then verily, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of those who are good." [Yusuf: 90]

A nation or community needs a good and effective leadership in order to succeed and reach newer heights. The Qur'an tells us that getting such a leadership is also hinged upon *sabr*.

> "And We made from among them leaders guiding by Our command when they exercised *sabr* and when they were certain of our signs." [As-Sajdah: 24]

In order to seek help from Allah, we have been asked to offer prayers (which brings us closer to Allah), and in the same breath we have been asked to adopt *sabr* (which corrects our approach):

> "Seek help with *sabr* and prayers" [Al-Baqarah: 45]. *Sabr* has been the defining feature of all the great Prophets of yore. "So hold on to *sabr* (O Muhammad ﷺ, as did those determined Messengers (before you)." [Al-Ahqaf: 35]

> "And Ismail and Idrees and ZulKifl—they were among those who exercised *sabr*." [Al-Anbiya: 85]

Sabr is a very important subject of the Qur'an, Its virtues and merits have been expounded at about 90 places. Here, we have relied on only those verses which deal with the question of what should be the collective approach and strategy of Indian Muslims.

What Exactly Is Sabr?

Sabr is among those Islamic terminologies which have been grossly misinterpreted. In times of difficulty and distress, restraining oneself from being ungrateful to Allah or whining or grumbling, and staying content on His plans is what we commonly understand from the word '*sabr*,' and rightly so. But apart from this, *sabr* is also erroneously restricted to 'keeping away from confrontation and struggle,' 'unilaterally keeping mum against tumult and oppression' and 'quietly waiting for injustice and tyranny to come to an end without raising a finger.' In some cases, in the wake of some expediency, these attitudes too can be a requirement of *sabr*, but restricting *sabr* to these attitudes and to always imply these things alone in the name of *sabr* is indeed a gross misinterpretation of this great Qur'anic terminology, and an injustice at that! By restricting it to this meaning, not only do several Islamic commands turn ineffective, the spirit of Islam itself gets affected.

The most beautiful and comprehensive definition of *sabr* that I have come across is the one offered by Imam Raghib Asfahani رحمه الله. He says:

> "To keep oneself adhered to a task which is considered good by the *Shari'ah* and the intellect, or to keep oneself away from that which is considered bad by the *Shari'ah* and the intellect is *sabr*."[1]

Imam Ghazali ﷺ has also said something similar. He says that *sabr* is when a person allows the 'motives of knowledge and intellect and deen' to override his 'motives of desires and lust.' [2]

These definitions provide a very comprehensive idea of *sabr. Sabr* is thus the ability to control our desires and emotions.

Individuals and communities often choose the wrong path when they are overwhelmed by their emotions. The control of the intellect and deen over emotions is *sabr*, while losing control over emotions amounts to being impulsive and impatient. *Sabr* entails that everything that a man does should be rooted in the call of his reason and intellect and the understanding and wisdom that one derives from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. He should have complete control over himself. He should not take even a single step without consciously thinking over it. Our modern terms like will power, self-control and self-restraint are all manifestations of *sabr.*

What is Impulsiveness and a Lack of Sabr?

When our emotions run wild, we lose control over ourselves. Man becomes a slave of his emotions. His ability to think and reason gets suspended. His senses turn defunct. He is unable to appreciate even those things which are loud and clear, he is unable to read the writing on the wall, he is unable to listen to the voice of his conscience. Oblivious of the world and whatever it contains, he flows in the flood of his emotions. This is akin to intoxication. An intoxicated person loses control over himself, his words and actions. He wakes up to the disaster his actions have wrought only when he turns sober. It is only then that he starts seeing the truth and is overcome with remorse. The same holds true for those who get swayed by their emotions and lose their senses. This is called impulsiveness, and this is categorically a lack of *sabr.*

Emotions are also precious gift of Allah. If a man is bereft of anger and wrath, the injustice and evils that are being perpetuated in this world would not make him anxious or restless and he would never resist them. If he lacks self-respect and dignity, he would never be able to protect the honour of his family and religion. In the same vein, if he lacks the emotions of fear and dread, he would not be able to save himself from potential dangers. Similarly, sexual feelings grant a man peace and tranquillity and are necessary for the propagation of species. Without the desire to earn and provide for the family and the love that a man has for his wife and children, the institution of family would never sustain itself. All these facts tells us that emotions have a very positive role to play in the life of a person. They can neither be wiped off, nor would it be a beneficial or prudent thing to do so. What is rather required is that all our emotions remain balanced. We need to control them, abiding by the dictates of our deen, intellect and understanding.

Impulsiveness or lack of *sabr* is the result of a reactive behaviour. The actions of these men, their activities, their dealings, are all completely dependent upon some external powers and their actions. They would not move an inch on any other day, but the moment the government takes a wrong decision they suddenly become agitated and enter the arena. They would be least interested in communicating their thoughts to people, but would react vehemently to any criticism or insult that comes their way. What this means is that their stand and actions are decided by the stand and actions of some other people.

Such people become soft fodder and cheap labour for oppressive and exploitative forces. If the political interests of those powers so demand, they would instigate and flare up their emotions at will and thus use them to create the environment they need. Without even knowing so, these gullible people become

pawns at the hands of their rivals and serve their interests. Their acts of commission and omission get dictated by the plans and strategies of other people, and they eventually benefit none but their rivals.

In contrast, *sabr* is defined by a proactive behaviour. A person who acts upon *sabr* would remain steadfast upon his values, his principles, his goals and objectives. He would always be on his toes to achieve them. The things that motivate him and the things that determine his course of action are not external powers but his own principles, his own goals and his own values. He would determine his actions on the basis of his principles, using his intellect and understanding. His attitude and approach in life would be an outcome of his own plans and strategies.

But it should also be kept in mind that a lack of *sabr* is not only about getting agitated or falling prey to extremist attitudes, getting afraid, getting anxious and apprehensive, losing courage are all also indicative of a lack of *sabr.* This is because fear is also an emotion. As with all other emotions, when this emotion gets expressed where it should not be expressed, and grows out of control to impede those tasks which our intellect and understanding would have us discharge, then this too would be counted as a lack of *sabr.* Fear, dread, cowardice, sycophancy and capriciousness are all products of a reactive approach. People who get overwhelmed with such emotions also become soft fodder for their enemies. The actions of these people too are not an outcome of their own ideas and strategies, but the cunning of exploitative powers.

Sabr is to prefer long-term interests, whereas impulsiveness is to sacrifice long-term interests at the altar of impulses and short-lived emotional satisfaction. The secret to the success of a nation or a community lies in keeping an eye on long-term

goals, in sacrificing immediate gains for their sake, in thinking about tomorrow, in steering clear of provocations, emotions and impulsiveness, and in thinking about the long-term implications of every step that one takes.

Sabr makes us focus on our destination, keeping us from getting unduly distracted by the distractions along the way. *Sabr* does not allow the traveller to fret and fume at every rock and obstacle that he encounters along his way, it keeps him from hitting and kicking it and injuring his own self in the bargain—for not only would this be of no benefit, but it would also incapacitate him from continuing with his journey. *Sabr* trains us to wait for the opportune moment. To restrain ourselves until we are blessed with the right time and opportunity is also part of *sabr*. Our long journey towards our destination requires us to keep walking along the straight middle path with perseverance. An impulsive mind always seeks crooked shortcuts which throw us farther away from our destination. Getting engrossed in those shortcuts exhausts us and makes us incapable of continuing with our journey.

If this incredible quality of *sabr* finds roots in a community, it becomes a force to reckon with. It equips that community with social power. This is one of those powers which are indispensable to a community's survival in a long-term struggle. It is for this reason that the Qur'an sees *sabr* as imperative to one's success and victory.

Sabr in the Life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to stick to *sabr* in every phase of his blessed life. Study of his life shows us that *sabr* has been a conspicuous aspect of his personal life and his collective strategies. While in Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ bore the brunt of his enemies' tortures, taunts and ridicule

with *sabr*. He never got provoked, he always exercised restraint. People who embraced Islam were tortured before his very eyes. They were martyred. His entire family and clan was banished for several years to the outskirts of Makkah. But he took to *sabr* and waited for the opportune moment, all the while focussing on his primary task—calling people to Islam. He was offered bribes of kingship, wealth, marriage with beautiful women and everything that a man could desire. But he remained resolute. Thus, remaining resolute, unfaltering and unwavering—for the sake of our values and principles, goals and objectives, in the face of such trials—is also *sabr*.

A wave of tyranny was unleashed upon the Prophet ﷺ at-Taif. He exercised *sabr* even then. In this phase, the Prophet did not try to use force against his enemies. Wisdom and prudence required him to refrain from getting engaged in an armed conflict. When the Muslims got organised in Madinah, and a state was formed, and the Prophet ﷺ, in the capacity of head of state, allowed them to wage war against the enemy, the Muslims finally got an opportunity after a decade to clamp down on the tyrants. They had endured with *sabr* all along, and they were tried with *sabr* even now. To unsheathe the sword against their own kith and kin for the sake of truth and justice was not an easy thing to do. They were required to exercise an extraordinary control over their emotions. But the Prophet and his companions displayed a remarkable level of *sabr* in this test too.

While in Madinah, the hypocrites troubled the Muslims with all sorts of conspiracies and incited civil unrest on many an occasion. They engaged in manifest treason during the battle of Uhud, which led to huge losses in the Muslim camp. They also cast aspersions on the Prophet's beloved wife and caused such chaos in Madinah for an entire month that the Prophet

was visibly distressed. They also constructed the Masjid Ziraar, which amounted to openly challenging the leadership of the Prophet. They sought to divide the people into groups and camps. Owing to all this, strong demands kept pouring in for the punishment of these hypocrites and the beheading of their leaders from even those companions who were closest to the Prophet. But prudence demanded that they should not be confronted, lest the believers get polarised into two conflicting camps. This is the highest form of *sabr*. Despite having all the power and authority, those anti-social elements were tolerated in the larger and long-term interest of the cause, and the natural urge of confronting and punishing them was kept under control with unmatched forbearance, their mischiefs were countered with proper diplomatic prudence.

After the Conquest of Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ forgave all those leaders of the Quraish whose cruelty and animosity kept eliciting terrible memories of torture.

Thus, the life of the Prophet ﷺ is a perfect practical model of all kinds of *sabr* in the most perspicuous manner. There's a lot we Indian Muslims can learn from his blessed life.

Indian Muslims and Sabr

I feel that in contemporary history, the one thing that has harmed Indian Muslims the most has been their impulsiveness. It is this impulsiveness and emotional overdrive that makes some of us veer towards extremism and some others veer towards depression and passivity. It is because of this attitude that we fail to notice the bad qualities of those whom we like, and turn a blind eye to the good qualities of those whom we dislike. It is because of this attitude that we see everything in this world in the binary of black and white. It is because of this attitude that we fail to understand the minds and emotions of India's majority

community, and hence find it difficult to communicate with them. This impulsiveness makes us react spontaneously with all our fury at unfavourable times and unfortunate events, but we find it difficult to engage in the earnest, slow and long-term work of reformation.

Our tragedy is that even our leadership is more often than not relegated to a mere mouthpiece of public outrage. Leadership is all about change. True leadership makes people dream of changing the current situation, illuminates the path and infuses the determination that is required to tread this path. It is the responsibility of our leadership to cultivate a serious attitude among the masses and save the masses from becoming a mob. They should keep themselves from succumbing to the unbridled emotions of the masses. They should instead groom the masses, and cultivate in them the ability to contemplate and work with a cool mind. For this, they should be ready to take tough decisions if the need arises, and even bear with their fleeting anger. Populism is also a manifestation of lack of *sabr* at the leadership level. It is fatal for leaderships to fall prey to populism at crucial times.

The Antitheses of Sabr and the Desired Attitude of Sabr

The following is a list of those attitudes which I feel negate the spirit of *sabr*, and they are also among the factors that have made us weak and broken:

1. To forsake our status and position

It is part of their creed and their concept of deen that the Muslims of this country are not one of the several contesting castes or racial groups which keep clashing with each other. But this is exactly what the ordinary non-Muslim thinks we are, and the same is evident from our attitudes as well. The Qur'an

and the *Sunnah* are very explicit in this regard. The Muslims are actually a party whose distinguishing factor is not its race, caste or ethnicity, but its creed, ideology and values. It is an Ummah with a mission and a cause. It is thus a party whose membership is voluntary, and is open to only those who concur with its mission and are attached to it. When we (subconsciously, nonetheless) begin to see Indian Muslims as a racial group or one of the mutually conflicting classes of this country, the people other than Muslims, living with them become strangers. They are alienated and a class struggle ensues, pushing them to form their own ghettos. As a result, the prophetic form of address, 'O my people' does not come naturally to them.

The real interest of this Ummah is nothing but the interest of its ideology, its values and its mission. Our impulsiveness does not allow us to remain steadfast on this mission. We are relegated to a sect among all other sects, a community among all other communities and a caste among all other castes. Our community ego and prejudices take precedence, while our mission and cause are put on the backburner. *Sabr* entails that we hold on to our position and status of 'Khairul Ummah' against all odds. The mission of spreading the word of God in this country should be more beloved to us than anything else, and its interests should take utmost precedence in our lives.

2. An extremist way of looking at things

Another consequence of deviating from *sabr* and becoming impulsive is that our perspective of looking at circumstances, events and issues no longer remains balanced. The proper way of forming an opinion about circumstances, events and people is that we should try to procure correct information from the actual source. We need to take into account and evaluate the statements

and arguments of all those involved in the matter. Next, we should discard all preconceived notions and prejudices and study the matter with a cool mind before forming an opinion. In today's world, people keep spreading all sorts of misinformation about their opponents. The internet, WhatsApp and social media become easy mediums of promoting and spreading these unfounded accusations. Believing in these posts without verifying them and forwarding them to others is an extremely irresponsible and un-Islamic thing to do. To completely rely on news clips and unverified WhatsApp posts in serious and critical matters, to allow the articles and analyses of stray authors writing on incredulous websites to influence our opinions, to form an opinion on the basis of our preconceived notions and prejudices, or to come to any conclusion without hearing out all the parties concerned are all irrational attitudes, which give birth to nothing but extremist opinions.

In most matters, we find a mixture of both, good and bad elements. Not everything is black or white, most matters exist in various shades of grey. If we fail to recognise the good and bad elements in their right perspective, we would stumble and falter, which we often do. A little criticism or offensive statement, and we quickly make our friend our enemy. Even a light grey shade appears black to our eyes. Even the most serious occurrence and the most upsetting event contains within it aspects of goodness or expedience. Likewise, even the events that seem favourable to us contain elements of evil and discord. The people we love and adore have human weaknesses too. The ability to see the goodness in a repugnant matter, things and people, and to see the ugly aspects of the things we like is the hallmark of a balanced viewpoint. Going to extremes in our likes and dislikes, love and hatred makes us blind. This causes our analyses to

go haywire, leading to devastating decisions and steps being taken. Right now, we are faced with a situation where because of the evil mentality and attitudes of the people present in the incumbent government, we refuse to view anything coming from their end with a balanced and accommodative lens. It is but obvious that such an attitude harms none but our own selves. This damaging mentality is nothing but a consequence of our lack of *sabr*. The overwhelming influence of our emotions and the repression of our reason and intellect puts filters on our vision, befogging our view.

If things have to change on the ground, they would always do so in a phased manner. The issues we face today are the result of circumstances spanning many decades. The years of negligence, shortcomings and mistakes on our part are also responsible. The prolonged and resilient struggle of the enemy has also played an important part in creating these issues. We cannot click a key on the computer and change the situation overnight. We need to prepare ourselves for a prolonged struggle which would test our patience. We would have to endure the hardships that we encounter on this path. And we need *sabr* for this too.

3. A deep sense of victimhood

The overriding influence of our emotions on our reason and intellect, our analyses and derivations has given rise to one more problem, which we can refer to as a deep sense of victimhood. Muslims have had to bear the brunt of injustice in this country, they have been treated with bias and prejudice, and times have not been kind to them. This is something that cannot be denied. But these things should be seen and shown only as much as they really are. Endlessly harping upon the injustices inflicted upon us, speaking of conspiracies with undue exaggeration and repeating lame conspiracy theories with ridiculous persistence,

to overestimate the power of evil and underestimating our own strengths, feeling helpless, to keep wailing over our helplessness and vulnerability—all these cultivate a false sense of victimhood in the minds of the ordinary youth. He feels that all the roads have been shut upon him, and he sees no ray of hope whatsoever. This sense of insecurity is extremely dangerous. If it is not averted, it can put an end to our progress, our determination, our fighting spirit and ambitions.

If you go through the statements of Muslim journalists and leaders belonging to various periods of time post-independence, in each period you would find them lamenting that the situation has never been as bad as it is today, there is a cascade of injustice, the very survival of the community is in question, our ship is sinking etc. Does it behove us to keep indulging in this kind of rhetoric? We, who recite Surah Muzzammil and Muddassir and Ad-Duha and Alam-Nashrah and believe in the philosophy of *sabr*! Our lack of *sabr* makes these constrained circumstances occupy our spectrum of vision, whereas *sabr* allows us to dream of a better tomorrow and focuses our attention on the strategies which would help us realise those dreams.

Our country indeed presents challenges. But challenges can be found everywhere, only their form varies. I accept that the situation today has tilted heavily against the Muslims. But other classes of society have also been subjected to such difficulties in the past. This is how life is! Nobody gets absolute justice. We are surrounded by injustice, exploitation and tyranny. We are required to live with all these difficulties. This is part of the divine plan, and the nature of this fleeting world. I say fleeting because only paradise is eternal. We should indeed strive to change this situation and fight injustice, but there is no need to get afraid or panic. Every challenge brings along opportunities. Every person

walking on the road is threatened by a potential accident. This potential threat is all the more severe for those travellers who embark upon long and dangerous journeys. The Muslim is one such traveller. The exalted ideology and mission that Muslims carry makes them a potential target of many difficulties.

4. Being oblivious of our priorities and to get engrossed in non-issues

A lack of *sabr* makes us oblivious of our priorities. A piece written by Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi رحمه الله is being shared widely these days, it shows a mirror to our present situation. He writes:

> "A common cause to both rise and decline of Muslims is their spontaneous and impulsive excitement. They can act like a deluge and tear mountains apart, but cannot clear the path of every single stone like a quarry-man does. They can act like a bolt of lightning and burn a haystack to ashes, but cannot carry each and every grain like an ant does. They can shed their blood in defending a masjid, but they cannot take pains to renovate a dilapidated masjid...The politics that is being played in India these days, I do not think Muslims can prove to be masters of that game. For, this is a battlefield in which each step needs to be taken with utmost caution, whoever sprints ahead is bound to lose. The actual reason we lose is because we come like a deluge and recede like a bolt of lightning. Instead, we need to mimic a river which flows slowly and steadily, and perseveres over many years to chip away its banks and widen itself. Success lies in perseverance alone. The ice on Himalayan peaks melts slowly, but it never allows the Ganga and Yamuna to dry up. Heavy rains, on the contrary, require only a couple of hours to turn barren land into a pond, but in a matter of days that land becomes a crucible of dust storms yet again."[3]

The attempt to build a favourable public opinion about

Islam in this country is not only in the interest of our cause and mission, but it is also essential for our survival and progress in this country. How can you be expected to be happy when the resounding majority of the country sees you as an extremist or a terrorist, harbours various misunderstandings about your religion, your Prophet and your scriptures, considers your period of rule in history as the root cause of all its problems, and views your very existence as a burden on the country? It becomes your prime responsibility, then, to dispel these misunderstandings and foster a favourable opinion about Islam.

Most importantly, the Muslims ought to become models and ambassadors of Islam, and their society should personify the teachings of Islam. Defending the masjid is no doubt necessary, but it is also equally necessary for Muslims themselves to fulfil the rights of the masjid. We get stirred up when the issue is about safeguarding the *shari'ah*, but we raise not an eyebrow when the *shari'ah* is nowhere to be seen in our own lives. Respecting the Prophet ﷺ is much more obligatory upon Muslims than it is upon non-Muslims, and the most important aspect of this respect is obeying him and aiding his mission. It is indeed distressing to see a Muslim girl elope with a non-Muslim man, but it is equally distressing that the Muslim society is neglectful towards Muslim women's rights and is making their own daughters disown the Muslim society.

Likewise, a major contributor to the woes of Indian Muslims is their weakness and vulnerability. Social fragility weakens our defence. This weakness needs to be overcome with a planned development in the fields of education, economy etc. Until and unless we expend earnest efforts on these fronts and develop social strength, we would not be able to get rid of our weakness and vulnerability. Weakness and vulnerability are the

biggest roadblocks in our path to development and progress.

5. Detachment from justice and a just approach

Justice is the single most important virtue of Islam. The Muslims have been commanded to be just and to stand up for justice, come what may. The Qur'an is very explicit in saying, *"O you who believe, stand out firmly for Allah, as witness to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you prevent you from being just. Be just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah, for Allah is well acquainted with all that you do."* [Al-Maidah: 8] In the light of this ayah, it becomes absolutely impermissible for us to act unjustly against some people out of a grudge that we may have against them. The attitude of *sabr* entails that we resolutely stick to justice. When others are unjust to us, we should indeed seek justice, but we should never reciprocate with injustice. Our hearts should bleed when the blood of an innocent person is spilt, regardless of what his or her affiliations are. We should never take the law in our own hands, even if it involves blasphemy or the desecration of Islam, we should instead move court if we wish to punish the guilty. All these are requirements of justice and the core values of Islam. To abide by these values against all odds and to have complete control over our emotions in doing so is *sabr*. If we fail to do so, we would neither be able to present Islam's humane and just teachings, nor would we be able to vouch for them.

6. To remain unconcerned about the outcome of our actions or steps

When we are faced with difficult times, *sabr* requires us to keep our emotions in check and ponder over the outcome of the steps that we intend to take. What kind of speech would accrue what result? What would we gain from what kind of Facebook post? What would we achieve from which statement? It is true

that our emotionally charged gestures, speeches, slogans and actions do give vent to our emotions. We would also be lauded by emotionally sensitive sections of the Ummah for the same. But does it serve the interest of our cause and mission in any way? Would it help resolve the matter under consideration? Myopic statements that are devoid of any foresight, provocative speeches, worthless protest marches and ostentatious and pretentious resistance movements can very easily catapult even incompetent men to heroic status in our country. This shortcut approach to becoming a hero or mass leader should be discouraged by the Ummah and its leadership. Such tendencies are responsible for most of the tragedies our community finds itself in. The importance of protests and resistance movements cannot be denied, they have become all the more important in these turbulent times. But whatever we do should follow a planned decision that has the expected outcome in mind, not some spontaneous emotional appeal or provocative speech.

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Tawakkul, Strategy and the Collective Attitude of Ummah

Tawakkul urges us to adopt a plan and act prudently, and it also inculcates faith and determination. It allows us to remain humble in the midst of great victories; and, in the eventuality of a failure, it encourages us to seek new ways out without getting dejected and to keep pursuing our cause with steadfastness. Tawakkul is, thus, a powerful and effective product of faith in Allah. It is a source of all those positive and constructive attitudes which are considered the keys to success.

For the Muslim Ummah to succeed and thrive, there is one more quality that the Qur'an mandates—*tawakkul 'alallah* (to rely upon Allah). Just like *sabr*, the quality of *tawakkul* too develops a certain temperament and perspective. And just like *sabr*, this immensely important Islamic concept has also been besmirched with various kinds of misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Consequently, our contemporary collective approach seems far removed from the Islamic philosophy of *tawakkul* and its true spirit. In this essay, we shall expound upon the concept of *tawakkul* and its philosophy, and we shall also discuss how the philosophy of *tawakkul* can enlighten the path

of Indian Muslims in determining their collective approach.

The Importance of Tawakkul

The word *tawakkul* finds mention in the Qur'an some 42 times, and this quality has been introduced as a being imperative to belief in Allah. *"If you really believe in Allah, then rely upon Him if you should be Muslims."* [Yunus: 84] *Tawakkul* has also been made mandatory for success not only in the Hereafter, but also for success in this world. When confronted by a powerful enemy, the righteous have been asked to take to *tawakkul.*

> "If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you, but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him? And upon Allah let the believers rely." [Aale'Imran: 160]

When the going gets tough, and there seems no way out of the predicament, we have been commanded to rely upon Allah, He would ease out a way for us and suffice for us. *"And whoever fears Allah, He will make for him a way out. And He will provide for him from sources he never could imagine. And whoever relies upon Allah, then He sufficient for him."* [At-Talaq: 2-3] In times of difficulty, when we are surrounded by problems, we have been asked to rely upon none but Allah.

> "Tell them that 'nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us, He is our protector,' and upon Allah let the believers rely." [At-*Taubah*: 51]

With every intended response to the circumstances that befall us, the Qur'an has intertwined *tawakkul* in such a way that reliance upon Allah becomes the most important component of a believer's attitude and approach in every difficult situation. It becomes the most explicit response of a believer in the wake of challenges and issues, and an integral part of Muslim Ummah's collective consciousness. In the most critical phase of the

Prophet's ﷺ mission, he was urged to continue preaching Islam while reposing his trust in Allah.

> "Allah is the owner of the East and the West. There is no authority other than Him, so take Him as your wakeel (rely upon Him)" [Al-Muzzammil: 9]

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was told that calling people to Islam is his actual mission and purpose, so he should keep doing so regardless of what response he gets from the people. Regardless of whether the people accept his call or not, his task was to give glad tidings and warn them. He was asked to discharge his duty and leave the rest to God and rely upon Him.

> "And rely upon the Ever-Living who does not die, and celebrate His praise, and sufficient is He to be acquainted with the faults of His servants." [Al-Furqan: 58]

While delving upon the conspiracies of the hypocrites, the Prophet was asked to ignore them, their conspiracies would cause him no harm, you should instead rely upon Allah.

> "Allah records what they plan by night. So leave them alone and rely upon Allah. And sufficient is Allah as disposer of affairs." [An-Nisa': 81]

When you go to war, do so while relying upon Allah. In the backdrop of the battle of Uhud, the Prophet ﷺ was told:

> "And consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely upon Him." [Aale'Imran: 159]

And when you enter into a truce, this should also be done while relying upon Allah.

> "And if the enemy inclines towards peace, then you too incline towards peace, and rely upon Allah, for He is the one who hears and knows all things." [Al-Anfal: 61]

The Qur'an has presented the examples of great Prophets to show how they had relied upon Allah in every phase of their struggle. The ability to remain steadfast upon our cause and mission and adhere to our principles even in dire circumstances is something that can be achieved only through *tawakkul.* When the people of Prophet Shuaib ﷺ warned him that they would banish him out of their lands and ostracise him if he refuses to return to their fold, he replied

> "We have relied upon Allah. Our Lord, decide between us and our people in truth, and You are the best of those who give decisions". [Al-A'araf: 89]

When the people of Prophet Nuh ﷺ expressed anguish at his prolonged efforts, he challenged them outright:

> "O my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah has become burdensome upon you—then I have relied upon Allah. So resolve upon your plan and call upon your associates, so that your plan is not dark and dubious. Then pass your sentence on me, and grant me no respite." [Yunus: 71]

Prophet Hud ﷺ had also said the same thing to those who were opposing his mission—do what you may, I shall not relent, I rely upon Allah. *"So plot against me all together, and give me no respite. Indeed, I have relied upon Allah, who is my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature but that he holds its forelock. Indeed, my Lord is on a straight path."* [Hud: 55-56]

The Concept of Tawakkul and Its Philosophy

Tawakkul has been variously defined in Islamic literature. To rely upon Allah, to hand over our matters to Allah, to ignore the difficulties and problems one faces because of fellow human beings, to remain content over Allah's plans, etc. In my opinion, the best definition of *tawakkul* is the one offered by renowned

scholar and exegete, Ibn Jarir Tabari. He defines *tawakkul* as the "complete trust and reliance upon Allah in all matters, and to hand over the matter to Allah after exhausting all possible efforts (and plans)."[1] In light of this definition, effort and strategy also have a part to play in *tawakkul.*

At several places in the Qur'an, the believers have been asked to take necessary precautions. While the Qur'an says:

> "Allah will provide for him from sources he never could imagine. And whoever relies upon Allah, then He sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a decreed extent" [At-Talaq: 3]

It also says:

> "And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah" [Al-Juma'a: 10]

Allah has promised the believers that He would help them, but He has also commanded them to strive and struggle on every occasion. Why, He has also commanded them quite explicitly to procure all necessary material tools and resources that they would require in their struggle and to keep them ready!

> "And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier." [Al-Anfal: 60]

As far as the collective life of the Ummah is concerned, the Qur'an has made it very clear that Allah changes the circumstances of a nation only when that nation makes an effort in that direction.

> "Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their own selves." [Ar-Ra'ad: 11]

At several places in the Qur'an, the mention of *tawakkul* is accompanied with some special attributes of Allah.

"Whoever relies upon Allah, then indeed Allah is Aziz (Exalted in Might) and Hakeem (Wise)." [Al-Anfal: 49]

"And rely upon al-Aziz, ar-Raheem (the Merciful)." [Ash-Shu'ara: 217]

"Indeed, He is as-Sami (the Hearing) al-'Aleem (the Knowing)." What this means is that *tawakkul* implies that a person should believe in Allah's power and authority, His knowledge, His mercy and His wisdom too. *Tawakkul* includes faith in Allah's power and authority, His mercy and compassion. Having faith in His *Sunnah* (Allah's customary way of acting) is also part of *tawakkul.* It is necessary to repose one's trust in Allah's will as well as His promises. Allah is Omnipotent, He is not dependent on means and resources. But in this world, He fulfills His will using the agency of the laws of nature. It is for this reason that using necessary means and resources is part of Allah's practice or his *sunnah.* When, in particular, we ponder over the higher purpose of the Muslim Ummah and the efforts it takes towards its cause, we realise that employing the best means and resources in this cause is actually reliance on Allah's *sunnah.* To adopt a plan with the certitude that it would definitely yield positive results is reliance on Allah's promise. To move ahead with faith and determination without getting overawed by powerful forces and larger interests, and to pursue our goals regardless of our apparent strengths and abilities is reliance on Allah's power and support. To take positively whatever difficulty, challenge or apparent failure we come across in this way in our stride, accepting them as Allah's will and regarding them as the harbingers of much good, to avoid getting discouraged and to face them with utmost resolve and to continue ahead is reliance on Allah's mercy. *Tawakkul* comprises of all these qualities and attitudes. Thus, *tawakkul* urges us to adopt a plan and act

prudently, and it also inculcates faith and determination. It allows us to remain humble in the midst of great victories; and, in the eventuality of a failure, it encourages us to seek new ways out without getting dejected and to keep pursuing our cause with steadfastness. Tawakkul is, thus, a powerful and effective product of faith in Allah. It is a source of all those positive and constructive attitudes which are considered the keys to success.

The Qur'an tells us that all the great Prophets of yore used to have complete faith and reliance on Allah, and it also gives us ample hints to show that they were not neglectful of material means and resources and worldly precautions and strategies either. When Yusuf ﷺ narrated his dream to his father, he immediately cautioned him:

> "O my son, do not narrate your dream to your brothers, lest they conspire against you." [Yusuf: 5]

Thus, Prophet Yaqoob ﷺ urged his son to take necessary safety precautions. Later, when his sons sought his permission to take their brother Benjamin along with them at the invitation of Yusuf ﷺ, he replied:

> "O my sons, do not enter from a single gate, but enter from different gates. And I cannot avail you against the decree of Allah at all. The decision is only for Allah, upon him I have relied, and upon Him let those who would rely indeed rely." [Yusuf: 67]

This advice that this great Messenger of Allah offers his sons explains the philosophy of *tawakkul*. He begins with hinting at possible precautionary measures that can be taken by a human being, and concludes with the proclamation of reliance upon Allah. The plan Yusuf ﷺ had formulated to save the nation from an expected famine and the material steps he took in that regard have been detailed in the Qur'an. Even Prophet

Muhammad ﷺ himself, in every phase of his struggle, had taken all necessary precautions and adopted the best possible strategies. He entered into treaties, fought wars, migrated, sought refuge in a cave while migrating, made allies, foiled conspiracies. In a nutshell, he effectively adopted all the ways and means that are available for success in this world and the achievement of one's goal and objective.

But at the same time, it should also be clear that while adopting these steps and precautions, the Prophets never relied exclusively on those steps and precautions. Obeying the divine command, they faced the greatest powers with writ and determination. They spectacularly succeeded in difficult expeditions despite lack of sufficient means and resources. They accomplished seemingly impossible feats. They stood up to the most challenging situations and cruised through them. In other words, not only did they rely upon Allah's practice, they also relied upon His power and promises. Having faith in His practice entails adopting the best possible strategy, while having faith in His power and promises means that those strategies should not be entirely relied upon.

The importance of means and resources and plans and strategies is highlighted in the fact that even when some Prophets were granted the ability to perform certain miracles and given supernatural aid, some or the other obvious and apparent agency was always employed for the same. In order to cure Prophet Ayyub ﷺ, he was asked to strike the ground with his feet [Saad: 42]. Prophet Nuh ﷺ was asked to construct a ship to save himself from the flood [Hud: 37]. The Red Sea was parted for Prophet Musa ﷺ only when he struck the sea with his staff [Shua'ara: 63]. Mariyam ﷺ had to shake the trunk of the tree for ripe dates to fall upon her [Mariyam: 25]. In all these cases,

these blessed souls were provided aid in supernatural ways, but the mention of some effort or some material mean—no matter how insignificant—in all these episodes points towards the fact that Allah's aid would arrive only once the person concerned has done that thing which lies within his scope.

This philosophy of *tawakkul* has been explained further in a renowned *hadith* in which a companion asked the Prophet ﷺ, "Should I tie my camel with a rope and have *tawakkul* or should I leave it free and have *tawakkul*?" The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Tie it with a rope and then have *tawakkul*." [2]

From the above discussion, we understand that *tawakkul* is actually a combination of the following four attitudes:

1. To exhaust all possible efforts to achieve our goal and objective, irrespective of what situation we face, and employ all possible means and resources for the same without leaving any stone unturned.
2. To repose complete faith in Allah's power and promises while putting in our efforts, to feel our strengths and abilities increase by leaps and bounds under His backing, and to discharge our duties in the immense self-confidence that develops as a result of this reliance on Allah.
3. After having done whatever we could, to leave it to Allah and to believe that Allah would decide whatever is best for us.
4. To thank Allah if things work out as planned. If not, to have firm faith that whatever has happened has happened as per some divine wisdom, and there is much good for us in this as well, and to thus remain content at His decisions. [But we should access and introspect on our mistakes and shortcomings in planning and execution] To thus do whatever we could, and leave the rest to Allah.

When we consult a good doctor, we rely upon him

and surrender our bodies to him. He makes us drink bitter medicines, gives us painful injections, he might even cut open our stomach and sever our organs, but we have complete faith in him that whatever he is doing is for our own good. At times, the rationale behind some painful treatment procedures are beyond our understanding, but we repose our trust in that doctor and his expertise. We are well aware of our own ignorance and also of his knowledge when it comes to medical science. It is for this reason that we readily bear that temporary pain and discomfort. We take it for granted that all the discomfort that this expert doctor is making us undergo is completely worth it, that it would all play a role in our recovery, even if we fail to understand how.

Our reliance on Allah should be much more than this. Our attitude regarding the problems and difficulties that lie on our way should also be that if we try our level best, those difficulties would also, hopefully, open up ways to our success.

Thus, *tawakkul* means that we should do whatever we possibly can to the last degree, and at the same time not feel helpless and dejected at those things that are beyond our control. After discharging our duty faithfully, our hearts and minds should be brimming with faith, determination, peace and contentment. We should worry or feel anxious only when we are not executing our plans and strategies to the best of our abilities. But once we have done our part, then Allah is sufficient, and we are pleased and satisfied at whatever He has willed.

Tawakkul, and Its Effect on Our Collective Attitude

Tawakkul, and this spirit of *tawakkul*, delivers human beings and human society from many of those weaknesses which come in the way of success and victory and act as fetters binding their feet.

1. Planning, means and struggle: An important cause of failure is negligence towards planning, adopting means and engaging in struggle. *Tawakkul* is not about abandoning these, but about employing these to the optimal level. It is Allah's *sunnah* that He makes use of means and resources to fulfil His plans. As I have explained above, having *tawakkul* on Allah also includes respecting this *sunnah*. Allah commands us to adopt means and resources, and chalk out a viable plan and strategy. Hence, having reliance on Allah necessitates obeying this command to the best of our ability. This is complete reliance on God's way and practice. Irrespective of whether the matter concerns your personal life or it is about collective affairs, a believer is expected to first make a plan and put in his best efforts towards realising it, then seek Allah's help and surrender his matters to Him. A student is expected to first study properly, and then leave the results to God. A patient is expected to first get himself treated properly, and then remain content at whatever Allah has decided for him. A person should first go to work and seek an income, and then show satisfaction and contentment at whatever his Lord grants him of sustenance. Even in social life, Muslims can never hope of divine aid and help to arrive while also remaining negligent of planning a good strategy and expending efforts towards its fulfilment. It is necessary for them to chart out a wise plan, develop superior skills among themselves, earnestly seek out the real causes of their weakness and backwardness and seek remedies, develop an effective and skilled leadership, strive to procure the best means and resources and employ them in the best possible manner, become an embodiment of struggle and sacrifice, adopt the latest techniques of study and research, planning, management and leadership. These are the very ways in which success can be achieved in this physical and material world. God Almighty does not make His pious servants independent of these known means of achieving success. Allah's most beloved Prophet was also required to tread this path. Adopting these means and resources is the 'tie your camel by the rope' of this age, which is part of *tawakkul*.

2. Decision, Will and Risk: In order to succeed in any field, it is very important to have strong decision making skills. A small delay in making a decision often offsets our success by several miles. The quality of *tawakkul* imparts a man with decisiveness. It is against the spirit of *tawakkul* to fall prey to indecisiveness, doubts and apprehensions. *Tawakkul* entails that a man should think and reason, consult others and then arrive at an opinion and then rely upon Allah and go ahead. *"Then once you have decided, rely upon Allah."* [Aale'Imran: 159]

The Prophet ﷺ has taught us to perform *istekhara*. This is a very simple way of making tough decisions in accordance with the principle of *tawakkul*. Here, a person ponders over a matter, then surrenders the matter to Allah and seeks a positive outcome from Him and decides upon a single course of action. He then gets engrossed in implementing it with all his heart and soul.

Big decisions carry big risks too. In social life, those making tough decisions may find these decisions invite personal difficulties, challenges and problems, and they may even threaten the peace of the entire organisation or community. The spirit of *tawakkul* makes it easier to take such risks. Taking risks is actually an outcome of relying upon Allah's help and support, His mercy and His promise that He would guide us. This is just as a small child sees that his father is standing behind him and walks along a dangerous stretch relying upon him.

3. Outcome Frame, not Blame Frame: These days, this is taught as an important subject of leadership development. A major cause of failure is that our minds are busy thinking about impediments and difficulties. Why did the difficulty arise? Who is responsible for it? What should be his punishment? Our entire focus is on these questions, and it deprives us of the ability to concentrate on our goals, to look ahead and walk ahead. It is therefore said that our focus should primarily be on what outcome

we desire and what is required in that direction at this hour. *Tawakkul* develops this outcome frame. Whatever has already happened is now out of the ambit of our planning and strategy. What others are doing is also beyond our domain. All these are hence handed over to Allah. All we have to see is what we can do in the given situation. What options have we been left with? What plan, what precaution, what step and what decision is left within our scope? What part of the rope remains in our hands at this moment that we can tie to a pole and hand over our affairs to Allah?

4. Focus on circle of influence, not Circle of Concern: Another similar theory has been proposed by renowned leadership coach, Stephen Covey[3]. He says that one important trait of successful people is that they focus on those things that they can do or those things that they can influence. He calls it the circle of influence. These people do try to expand their circle of influence, but they show least concern about those things which lie beyond their circle of influence. In contrast, unsuccessful people focus their time and energies on those things that lie beyond their control, on which they cannot exert any influence except expressing their interests or concerns. He calls this the Circle of Concern. For us to attain success, it is necessary to expend our limited strengths and energies in those avenues where we can bring about some change or obtain some result.

This is the very philosophy of *tawakkul*. *Tawakkul* also teaches us the same thing—those things which lie beyond your scope and power, about which you cannot plan or adopt any means or resources is in Allah's domain. Rely upon Him, supplicate to Him, seek His help and leave it to Him. To become anxious and apprehensive in that regard and to exhaust our mental and physical strengths after it is utterly futile. You should instead focus on those things about which you can actually do something, for that alone is your domain and circle, and that is where you have been commanded to tie the rope.

Experience tells us that it has been a constant hallmark of unsuccessful communities and nations that their focus lies more on external issues and difficulties. They keep crying over it day in and day out, and start believing that they would never be able to attain success and glory in the wake of those foreign issues. They are always preoccupied with wailing over the real and imagined tricks and conspiracies of their enemies. Successful people, on the other hand, are those whose vision is fixed on their target. Their focus is largely on those things that lie in their control and range of possibilities. They tend to pass over those things that lie beyond their reach. *Tawakkul* inculcates the very same spirit—to try to the best of our abilities and to leave the rest to Allah. This is an entirely different paradigm of thought. This paradigm makes individuals and groups pragmatic and optimistic.

5. Focussing on the Present instead of harping on the Past or being anxious over the Future: When individuals and nations start worshipping their history to ridiculous levels, they lose focus over their present state. Fond memories of their glorious past or the painful memories of past mishaps keep them from concentrating on today's issues and possibilities, whereas the Qur'an clearly states,

> "That was a people that has passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do. And you would not be asked about what they used to do". [Al-Baqarah: 134]

Whatever has already happened is now beyond our control. Its outcome is in Allah's hands. If something bad has happened because of some mistake that we have committed, then we can seek forgiveness and try to correct it—and this concerns our present. Similarly, those people who remain anxious over the future are also unsuccessful ones. We have discussed this in a previous essay that if the fear of a potential accident possesses a man, he becomes incapable of embarking upon any journey

in his life. Focussing on the past can lead to depression, while overthinking about the future leads to anxiety. Both are psychiatric illnesses. Just as these illnesses affect individuals, they can also affect entire communities. Allah alone knows what would befall us tomorrow. Our job is to do the best that we can do today. *Tawakkul* teaches us that if what we do today is in proper order, our future would also be in order... insha'Allah. We need not get afraid or apprehensive about it. Whatever would happen, would happen as per Allah's promises and practice. Hence, what is expected of us is to concentrate on the present and the work we need to do today. We should derive lessons from our past and keep an eye on the future when we plan something, but it is in the present that we need to actually strive and put in our efforts. Hence, our primary focus must be on today and the things that we can do today to brighten our future and overcome the losses we have incurred in our past.

6. Focus on possibilities, pragmatism and mental satisfaction: *Tawakkul* keeps a man mentally stable and satisfied in all times and circumstances. It never allows him to get depressed. It keeps a check on his emotions. It never allows the person or the community to break down even in the wake of a catastrophe. When faced by an obstacle, a person who practices *tawakkul* looks around for other ways to complete his journey instead of just sitting there and lamenting upon it.

Wisdom devoid of practice, critical and introspective analysis sans any concept of reform, and building castles in the air without any firm planning are all antithetical to the attitude of *tawakkul. Tawakkul* inculcates pragmatism and factualism, and allows us to focus on possibilities. We should see what we can possibly do. We should try to expand our range of possibilities, do whatever we can, adopt all possible strategies and means and resources, take all necessary precautions and take all possible

steps. This is the first condition of *tawakkul.* As for those things which lie beyond our range of possibilities, we should not waste our energies after them or feel apprehensive about them or spend our days and night engaging in futile discussions about them or expend our physical and mental efforts after them. Those things in where we are unable to do anything, have been left to Allah. We need to strive to our utmost and then rely upon Allah. This is exactly what *tawakkul* is, and this is essentially the spirit of *tawakkul.*

7. Steadfastness on one's principles, goal and objective: We have been touching upon this topic in all the essays of this series. *Tawakkul* helps us in remaining steadfast upon our principles, our goal and objective. Our principles and our objective are obtained from divine commandments. Our faith in these principles and objective requires us to remain steadfast upon them and to do whatever we can to fulfil and attain them. We have cited the examples of past Prophets in the previous pages in which they remained committed to their cause and mission. They kept insisting that we shall continue with our mission, that we would stick to *tawakkul* without paying any attention to what our adversaries do to us. When it comes to calling people to Islam and obeying Allah in what He has commanded us to do, relying solely upon material planning and the laws of nature is not sufficient, it is also necessary to enlist divine aid and support. When we put in all the efforts we can, then the result that would be obtained by divine support would be far greater than what our mere efforts and means and resources could possibly achieve. This faith itself is *tawakkul.* If there is no *tawakkul,* one would not be sincere to his principles.

If a man forgets his principles and falls prey to extremism in his haste to attain his higher goal, then this is also a sign of low *tawakkul.* As mentioned earlier with reference to an ayah from Surah al-Furqan, the Prophet ﷺ was told that his task was only to give good tidings and to warn, and that he should continue

doing this. As for those who sin, Allah is sufficient to take them to account, rely upon Him.

Tawakkul-based Strategy

Our collective attitude is often seen to be diagonally opposite the seven points that we have discussed above with respect to our desired collective attitude. We seldom plan, make a strategy or seek means. We hardly ever discuss those things which are regarded as essential conditions for success in today's times. Encouraging superior skills, appreciating them and making proper use of them is a rare spectacle. Academic institutions and think-tanks are few and far in between, and we have a very weak culture of taking decisions based on sound knowledge and research. The modern practices of leadership and management, planning and execution are missing. This, despite the fact that all these are included in 'means' and hence a requirement of *tawakkul*. On the other hand, we are very active and agile when it comes to criticising each other and ranting about the 'conspiracies' that are being played out against us and allowing all those things to overwhelm us on which we neither have any control, nor are they in any way related to our course of action. A large section of modern intellectuals seems to have grievances with our respectable ulema, just as we have several ulema who hold these modern intellectuals responsible for all the problems that the Muslim community is facing today. When one meets the elders, they find faults with the youth, and the youth finds faults with the elderly, with very few exceptions. This, despite the fact that *tawakkul* teaches us to accept responsibility for our own actions. If we are able to exert our influence over others, then we should definitely do so, else, we should primarily focus on our own deeds. If we analyze the speeches delivered by our community leaders, our editorials,

and most importantly the posts written by our young men on social media, we would realise that the entire community is thinking along a Blame Frame and wasting their lives after it. You would not find even a remote reference to any desired target or outcome. The better part of our collective strength is getting engaged in the Circle of Concern, not the circle of influence. Pick up any Urdu newspaper and run a glance over its editorial. Wailing over the Ummah's deprivation, lamenting over our problems and difficulties, enumerating the mischiefs and betrayals of so-and-so person, conspiracy theories, using the best language at their command to sketch a terrifying future that awaits us–all these can be found in abundance. But what needs to be done about it today? What should be our next step (which is referred to as action item in modern parlance)? You would not find answers to these questions in any of the scores of articles and editorials and the thousands of Facebook profiles that you come across. Our journalists, our intellectuals, our leaders, even our young university graduates seem to be bereft of any action item perspective. After writing long analyses and engaging in prolonged discussions, all they write in conclusion is 'something needs to be done about it,' 'some strategy needs to be formulated'... which ironically is exactly what we were supposed to do. The past is not our domain. The misdeeds of other forces and powers is also not our domain. Our domain is only our own work, our plan, our strategy. All our energies should be diverted at these, and these alone.

Indeed, it is very important to remain cautious of the conspiracies of evil forces. A strict review and retrospection of our past mistakes is also necessary. We cannot take any step without knowing what is happening in this world. It is indeed necessary to remain alert on all these fronts. An academic and

critical analysis of these issues is also required. But the logical purpose of all these efforts should be to determine our next step. This is what a conscious and goal-driven community should seek. Do refer to the past, do refer to the conspiracies of the enemy wherever required, do present an analysis on current affairs, but the purpose should be to seek out a strategy and action item that lies within our scope of possibilities. Without this, if we end every discussion with laments and wails and apprehensions and hopelessness, would it not go against the spirit of *tawakkul*?

This attitude of ours mirrors our mental framework. There is one mentality which is burdened with the question of 'Alas! How did this happen?' This is the mentality of a person whose past has crippled him. Another mentality is that which is overwhelmed with the question, 'Oh! What would befall us tomorrow?' 'What would happen if so-and-so were to happen?' This is the mind a cowardly person who has succumbed to future apprehensions. Both these mentalities lead to loss and failure. Both go against the spirit of *tawakkul*. The fact remains that these mental frameworks are one of those very factors which are largely responsible for our failure and the issues that plague us. The third mental framework is that of a believer who adheres to *tawakkul*. He leaves the past and the future to Allah. He leaves whatever lies beyond his domain to Allah. The questions that his mind puts forth before him are—'What is it that I need to do?' 'What is the way out for me in this situation?' 'What can possibly be done now to reach the target?' 'What are the options available before me to make things better?' This pragmatic mental framework is an outcome of *tawakkul* and paves the path towards success.

Right now, grooming the Ummah and its youth and equipping them with the quality of tawakkul is utmost required.

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2

Public Opinion

Building Public Opinion

In every age and era, it is the minorities who have moulded public opinion, but ghettos have never had any influence on public opinion. Whatever influence the latter have had, has always been negative. If we have not been able to influence the country's public opinion, the fault lies not in our being a minority, but in our being a ghetto and our inability to become an influential minority.

The first thing that is required for us to move forward towards our ultimate objective of *'Iqamat-e-Deen'* (establishment of deen) in our beloved country is that the public opinion of our countrymen ought to tilt in favour of Islam. While expounding upon the methodology of the Jamaat, the Constitution of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind states:

> "For the achievement of its Objective the Jamaat shall adopt constructive and peaceful methods, that is, it shall reform the mental outlook, character and conduct through propagation (of Islam), instruction and dissemination of Islamic ideas, and thus shall train public opinion in order to bring about the desired righteous revolution in the social life of the country."[1]

If there is anything that is urgently required in our quest for *Iqamat-e-Deen*, it is this! This is our very next immediate

target and milestone. We need to cross this stage to move ahead in this journey. *Iqamat-e-Deen*, i.e., to establish Allah's deen on earth, is the ultimate objective of Muslims. If we were to identify the most important interim goal towards the realisation of this ultimate objective, it would be, 'the public opinion of this land should tilt in favour of Islam.' The people of this country should be acquainted with the true deen, they need to be made aware of Islamic doctrine, values, principles, its perspective, world view and the merits of the Islamic way of life. Moreover, they should be impressed by it and a positive image of Islam should be cultivated in their minds.

Maulana Sadruddin Islahi ﷺ avers:

> "There are two important and fundamental implications of the existence of the non-Muslims in majority in our country. The first is that Islam should be conveyed to them with a two-fold sense of responsibility, and the second is that their genuine doubts should be dispelled, keeping them from succumbing to misgivings. Conveying Islam to them with a two-fold sense of responsibility implies that the fulfilment of this task should be considered a compulsory duty, and it should also be regarded as a necessary requirement of the Islamic movement. This task should be regarded as a necessary requirement of the Islamic movement because in the given circumstances it is apparently impossible for this movement to become a movement in the actual sense of the term and reach fruition unless it receives–and continues to receive–helpers and aides from this non-Muslim majority. This is because this non-Muslim majority is not an ordinary majority, it is an overwhelming majority comprising 87-88% of the entire population. Also, in more ways than one, the actual reins of administration and power are also held by this very majority."[2]

It is utmost necessary that our efforts and endeavours should now be focussed on this target. The outcome of all our

activities should be one—that is, the public opinion of our country should take a positive turn.

Post-independence, this task has not received the priority it deserves, Indian Muslims have neglected it in their personal and collective spheres. Muslims tried to safeguard and salvage their religious and social identity, they concentrated upon creating awareness about Islam among Muslims and reforming their society, and strived to reclaim their political, economic and civil rights. There is no denying the fact that all these tasks were indeed important, and are very much important today as well, but the most important task in a mixed society like India was to engage in a dialogue with the majority of this country, to try and impress upon the public opinion of this country and make attempts to construct and build it up on lines of Islamic teachings. The fact remains that this essential task has hardly been the goal of our collective efforts.

As a result, whatever change we have witnessed in the public opinion of this country in the past seventy years regarding Islam has almost always been negative. On the one hand, the situation today is such that Muslims are closer to Islam and their Islamic identity than ever before, knowledge about deen has become widespread, the ignorance and misplaced practices and innovations that were in vogue ostensibly in the name of Islam are on the decline, and even the modern educated class is proactive in religious work. But on the other hand, as far as the public opinion of the country is concerned, it has fallen prey to more misunderstandings about Islam than it has ever been. Hatred and animosity towards Islam has been increasing on a daily basis. As compared to earlier times, their perspective of Islam and Muslims has become more negative and less positive over the years.

We can very well blame national and international politics for this debacle, just as we can point fingers at the conspiracies of anti-Islam forces, and rightly so. But it is equally true that our weaknesses and lack of tact and prudence is also to be held responsible for the situation we find ourselves in. Anti-Islam forces have been trying to make Islam abhorrent in the eyes of Muslims as well. Islamic society has also been facing the all-round onslaught of liberal ideologies. The educational system has tried its best to make even Muslim youth adhere to non-Islamic paradigms. But if the conditions have improved on these fronts even after all these attacks, it is because our reformers have focussed their endeavours on reviving Islamic values among the Muslim population and to make Muslims adhere to Islam. Had the same efforts been expended in engaging in a dialogue with the countrymen at large and influencing public opinion in favour of Islam, we would definitely have witnessed positive results on this front as well.

Right now, the situation is such that changing the public opinion is not only the most important proactive agenda of Muslims, it is also their most important defensive agenda. Proactive, because the actual status of Muslims is that of preachers of Islam, and turning public opinion in favour of Islam is one of the most important tasks of Islam's preachers. And defensive, because right now, the principal agenda of anti-Islam forces is to malign Islam and to cultivate misunderstandings and misgivings about it. All around the world, and in our own country, the plots that are being hatched against Muslims are all rooted in a false image of Islam that has gained widespread currency. Unless this image is not cleared, we cannot expect the situation to get any better.

The topic under discussion relates to the public opinion that is formed based on issues. There is indeed a difference

between this and the public acceptance of Islam's message. But correcting the public image of Islam is essential to the public acceptance of Islam's message.

It is the need of the hour that Muslims should focus on this task with all their strength, and to devote a large chunk of their efforts and endeavours on this front. This task of inviting people towards Islam and building a favourable public opinion towards it should not be the preserve of only a handful of groups, it should instead be the agenda of the entire Ummah.

In the pages that follow, we shall try to explain that building public opinion is a multi-dimensional task which demands planned and systematic efforts on multiple fronts.

What is Public Opinion?

The subject of 'public opinion' has been doing the rounds of academic circles since the past two to three centuries. It has been discussed under various disciplines like political science, sociology, social psychology, history and communication studies. What is public opinion? How does it form and change? What are the factors that influence it? What are the powers that construct and deconstruct it?

Public opinion is not a collection of individual opinions. Rather, it refers to that influential view that casts an impression upon the conditions prevailing in contemporary society. There are many small minority groups in every society which have their own unique opinions, which are followed by a vast majority which does not possess any opinion of its own at all. Consequent to a play of various factors, the opinion or viewpoint of one of these influential minority groups impresses upon the society and comes to be known as the 'public opinion.'[3]

This public opinion is formed on the basis of some issue

or subject. For a public opinion to form, it is vital that a large section of the population regards that issue as important and is willing to bring it under discussion. Next, a considerable number of people should present their opinion on it, and this opinion should influence the prevailing conditions of that society.[4]

Social psychologists believe that more often than not, the public opinion is actually the opinion of a minority. An elite minority, which is usually just a handful of people, propagates its point of view in such a manner that it appears to be the view of the entire society.[4] Occasionally, this public opinion develops as a result of some crisis. Some serious social issue, event or catastrophe leads to a serious reaction in Society.[5] The emotions and sentiments that follow this reaction are exploited by this elite minority, which provides scholarly language and justifications to those emotions and sentiments. This leads to the formation of public opinion. It penetrates society by means of the elite discourse which this elite minority promulgates in society.[6]

Public opinion leans upon some specific beliefs. For instance, the belief that our nation is the best nation in the world, or the belief that the only key to a nation's economic development is free market capitalism, or that all the terrorism found in this world is rooted in ascertain religious dogma. The small minority groups preach and propagate these beliefs and make them widely accepted, which makes people look at all the prevailing conditions and events from a particular lens. For example, people who believe in the concept of free market economy always tend to put the blame of economic distress and falling markets on those government policies which are directed at providing succour to the deprived sections of society. This point of view provides the lens from which the future is now seen, and a certain collective resolve comes into existence. For example, the creed of extremist nationalism gives birth to a

fascist and colonial resolve that 'we need to reign supreme over the entire world by whatever means possible.'

Public opinion is always fragile and fleeting. It is likened to shifting sands which never remain constant.[6] A single event or crisis can turn a centuries-old public opinion on its head. In his book, Private Truths, Public Lies, renowned sociologist, Timur Kuran, has postulated a widely acclaimed theory called the Preference Falsification Theory.[7] According to this theory, it often so happens in modern democracy that the opinion expressed by the majority of the people is not their actual opinion, people tend to express that opinion which they feel is more socially acceptable.

To make an opinion socially acceptable is the handiwork of a small elite minority. If a small minority remains firm and rigid in its opinion, that opinion eventually becomes socially acceptable. Since the majority does not have any firm opinion of its own, it expresses that minority opinion as its own opinion. And as we have explained with reference to the Preference Falsification Theory above, it is often the case that the opinion so expressed by the majority is at odds with the opinion each of them harbours in his heart. Some social scientists have borrowed from mathematical progressive models to understand the formula by which the opinion of a small minority becomes the opinion of the vast majority. According to this mathematical model, as long as the proportion of those people who remain firm and resolute on an opinion remains less than 10%, that opinion remains a minority opinion. But as soon as it crosses the 10% mark (i.e., the number of those people who remain firm and resolute on an opinion exceeds 10% of the total population), that opinion spreads like wildfire to become the opinion of the masses.[8]

The elite minority has a crucial role to play in moulding

public opinion. They are hence rightly called agencies of public opinion. They are made up of the following individuals and institutions: [9]

1. Those who mould public opinion by means of public discussions: These include writers, analysts, poets, literati, journalists, film makers, lyricists and other such artists who lend speech to ideas and communicate them to the masses.
2. Those who mould public opinion by their actions: These are those well informed and proactive people who play an active role in the political and social life of society. They influence public opinion by means of their initiatives and actions.
3. Those who foster public opinion: These are activists who employ their campaigns, protests, fiery speeches, slogans and movements to cultivate and build public opinion.

All these three agencies play a vital role in moulding public opinion.

The reason behind delving into the technical aspects of this subject here was to help us in understanding the situation prevailing in our country at this moment, and the means by which we can reform it. Even today, the majority of Indians are not communal by nature. However, the relentless schemes of a small communal minority have given rise to a situation where a large portion of the population finds itself compelled at socially associating itself with the point of view of this minority. The formula to change and alter this situation, too, is that the pro-Islam minority should influence this majority view point by its consistent and exhaustive efforts. What is that we need to do in this regard? What course correction is required in our attitude and strategy? The answers to these questions are being offered in the pages that follow.

Building Public Opinion in Favour of Islam

What we understand from the above discussion is that if we wish to cultivate a public opinion favouring Islam, then we need to completely change the paradigm of our community's activities and attitude. In every age and era, it is the minorities who have moulded public opinion, but ghettos have never had any influence on public opinion. Whatever influence the latter have had, has always been negative. If we have not been able to influence the country's public opinion, then the fault lies not in our being a minority, but in our being a ghetto. And the second reason is that we have not been able to become an influential minority. In order to overcome these two factors, and to play an important and tangible role in moulding the public opinion of this country, we need to make the following amendments in our strategy, collective attitude and activities:

A. A sense of belonging and attachment with the society

For our point of view to impress upon the public opinion of the country, the first thing that is required is that we need to develop a deep bond with the society at large. The following principles of building public opinion are especially pertinent in this regard:

- Principle of Familiarity and Trust: Public opinion cannot accept the opinion of a person or group which it does not trust. Recognising and knowing the person/group presenting the idea and having trust in him are imperative for that idea to take the shape of public opinion.[10]
- Principle of Interest: People take interest in only those issues about which they feel it relates to their desires, fears, aspirations or hopes.[11]

The Principle of Familiarity requires that we should have

the same attachment with Indian society that the Prophets of God had with their respective nations. The Prophets ﷺ of Allah were well known faces of their nations. The Qur'an has been quite explicit that the esteemed Prophets were an integral part of their addressee nations.

• *We sent Moses with Our signs with the command, "Bring out your people from the depths of darkness into light, and teach them to remember the Days of Allah".* [Ibrahim: 5]

• *We sent not a Messenger except to teach in the language of his own people, in order to make things clear to them.* [Ibrahim: 4]

The Qur'an has also used terms like 'brother of the nation' and 'one amongst them' to refer to certain Prophets.

• *To the Aad, We sent Hud, one of their own brethren. He said: "O my people, worship Allah, you have no other God but Him, will you not fear Allah?"* [Al-Aa'raf: 65]

At several places, the Qur'an mentions that the Prophets were well-wishers of their addressees, and that their addressees trusted them on this.

• *"I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission, I am to you a sincere and trustworthy advisor."* [Al-Aa'raf: 68]

We need to seriously introspect whether the Muslims of this country share this sense of belonging with their fellow countrymen. The fact remains that owing to a number of historical factors, the Muslims have practically distanced themselves from the non-Muslim society at large. Far from taking any interest in their matters or maintaining an emotional bond with them, most Muslims do not even have an idea of the issues they face. Even today, most of our leaders tend to compartmentalise issues into 'our issues' and 'their issues.' Despite mixing up with non-Muslims on a daily basis, very few attempts have ever been made to understand the non-Muslims' stand on contentious

issues with an unprejudiced mind. This being the case, it is impossible for us to have any influence on the public opinion of this country. Because, as has already been mentioned above, for an idea to become acceptable, it is necessary that the people of the nation have a sense of belonging with the person presenting that idea. For this, we need to transform our image. To begin with, we need to do away with this binary of 'us' and 'them.' Our people, our organisations and institutions should inculcate within themselves the will and attitude to relate to the general population of this country. We need to build a conviction that we are the well-wishers of all the people of this country, and that we take an interest in their matters and issues. If not all ordinary Muslims, at least those Muslims who are conscious of the Islamic vision need to take an interest in all aspects of Indian society.

The Principle of Interest requires that our discourse should not only be defensive and reactionary, it should be in accordance with the contemporary issues facing our nation. A study of the teachings of the blessed Prophets that have been reproduced in the Qur'an tells us that every Prophet had included in his discourse the pressing issues of his particular society.[12]

Before embarking upon formal preaching, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had established an image for himself that he takes special interest in the issues plaguing his society, that he is their well-wisher, and keeps himself engrossed in the society's success and prosperity. We have ample proof of this in what Mother Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) had told the Prophet while consoling him right after he was commissioned as a Prophet. She had famously said: "Receive good news! By God, He would never harm you. You are the one who maintains ties of kinship, speaks the truth, lightens people's burdens, takes care of the deprived, are a generous host to your guests and helps

people in their hour of need".[13]

The primary addressees of the Prophet ﷺ were the Quraish. The Qur'an based its discourse on those historical facts that the Quraish were aware of, the legends that were a part of their folklore and the historical events whose traces they could witness all around them.

> "Do they not travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before them? They were superior to them in strength, and in the traces they have left in the land, but Allah did call them to account for their sins, and none had they to defend them against Allah." [Ghafir: 21]

Apart from this, argument was also built upon certain claims that the Quraish used to make (e.g. that they belonged to the lineage of Prophet Ibrahim and were his followers).

Later, when the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Madinah and addressed the People of the Book, the Qur'an used their own beliefs and claims to knit its own arguments.

> "Say, O People of the Book, come to common terms as between us and you—that we worship none but Allah, that we associate no partners with Him and that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah. If then, they turn back, tell them, 'Bear witness that we, at least, are Muslims (bowing to Allah's will).' O People of the Book, why do you dispute about Ibrahim, when the Torah and Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have you no understanding?" [Aale 'Imran: 64 and 65]

In order to influence public opinion, it is necessary for us to grow in proximity with Indian society. We need to play an active role in resolving its issues. We also need to understand this society in depth—its history, philosophy, nature, temperament, traditions, etc. There is no doubt that Indian Muslims need to preserve their religious and cultural identity. But we would have

to seek out a balanced middle path between the need for the preservation of this identity and the need for social proximity with our fellow countrymen.

B. Building Agencies of Public Opinion

Another thing that is required to influence public opinion is that a good proportion of Muslims should strictly abide by the teachings of Islam and become the preachers and ambassadors of Islam, Islam should also receive helpers and aides from among fellow countrymen, and at least a tenth of the population should be in a position to powerfully and emphatically present its opinion in favour of Islamic principles with sound belief and conviction. For instance, along with the Muslims, a sizeable portion of non-Muslim fellow countrymen should express faith in the family values of Islam, being convinced that it is a source of mercy for men, women, families and the entire society at large, or that the Islamic financial principles, which is free of interest-based dealings and speculative trading, is the only way to ensure economic development and eradication of poverty.

It is also utmost necessary that the above-mentioned agencies of public opinion should find space in the ranks of Muslims. It is imperative that those representing Islam should include expert writers, analysts, columnists, poets and producers and artists of fine art. We should also have individuals, organisations and institutions who take ample interest in the mundane issues of the nation and present solutions for the same. We need social activists who sweat their brows in dealing with national issues, who could use those issues to cultivate public opinion.

C. Focus on Influential Classes

We also need to focus on influential sections of society,

and to participate in the "elite discourse" viz. the debates going on among such influential sections. The recent turn of events has made Islam the hot topic of discussion all over the world. The first condition for an idea to be acceptable among the masses is that a large section of the population should see it as an important issue and be willing to discuss it. Fortunately, this condition has already been fulfilled with regards to Islam. Building people's interest in Islam is no longer a challenge. What is now required is to proceed to the next step—that the elite class should have a favourable opinion about Islam. There are several imperatives here:

The first imperative is that we need to raise a serious academic discourse on issues related to Islam. The need for a '*New Ilm-ul-Kalam*' (i.e., the science of discourse or theology) has been espoused by many intellectuals in recent times. Using renowned academic tools of the modern age, academic papers and books on Islam need to be published in English, Hindi and regional languages. These papers should be presented in elite and respectable academic colloquiums, and it should be ensured that these topics are brought under discussion in colleges and academic institutions of repute. This should be an important goal of the Muslim Ummah for the next few years. For this, it is indispensable to have within our ranks intellectuals and men of letters who possess an expertise not only in Islam, but also in modern social sciences. They should have a grip on the contemporary mind and must be able to address the world in the language of contemporary scholarship. We need to pay serious attention to ensure that a substantial portion of our intellectual crème de la crème dedicates itself to this task, and the Ummah should provide them with all necessary resources. The Islamic concept of eternal law, Women's status in Islam, Islam's family laws, the conviction that Islam is the only truth, Islam's view

about non-Muslims and the concept of Jihad are some of those core topics that form the basis for a negative public opinion against Islam. Until and unless we are successful in initiating an elite discourse on these topics, we cannot veer public opinion in a positive direction. Along with this defensive and reactionary discourse—and indeed more importantly—it is necessary to prepare modern literature on serious academic lines which would empathetically and with complete conviction present Islamic beliefs and the merits and rationale of Islamic values and lifestyle vis-à-vis the issues plaguing contemporary society. At this hour, our country is faced with a spree of problems. Various solutions are also being presented and they are being debated upon. We need to participate in this exercise with a firm conviction and determination, and offer ample contributions in formulating ideas. If we ponder over the issues employing a creative approach, while keeping in mind the spirit of Islam and the nature and objectives of the Islamic *Shari'ah*, then Muslims can present many an ideas related to developmental policy, economic system, environment, education, family and lifestyle. These ideas can be presented using the name and reference of Islam, and if needed without the name as well. For this, we need to establish active think-tanks and ensure a continuous publication of high quality research. We also need to make our presence felt in academic circles, seminars, policy discussions, the government's advisory councils, TV debates and newspaper and magazine columns.

The second imperative in this regard is to make ourselves heard in the media. The community has been talking of the importance of media since a long time, but all this talk is usually relegated to issues concerning Muslims alone. In order to turn the media into a means of opinion discourse, we require a good number of proficient columnists to devote themselves to this cause.

The third imperative is to have an environment where Muslim intellectuals engage in conversation and exchange of ideas with influential non-Muslim groups of the country. Very little attention could be paid to this task owing to a number of impeding factors. But it is high time this task receives a prominent place in the agenda of all Muslim organisations, religious scholars and intellectuals—that there should be an uninterrupted engagement with the likes of social activists, journalists, intellectuals, religious leaders, social and political leaders, officers and renowned professionals, and they should be acquainted with Islam. When we study the lives of the respected Prophets, we learn that they all began with addressing the influential class of their respective societies. Maulana Ameen Ahsan Islahi ﷺ writes:

> "Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ began by addressing his own family, which was at the helm of the country's priestly class. Next, he addressed the Emperor, who held the reins of the state's political affairs, and who regarded himself the master of his subjects' life and death... Prophet Musa ﷺ was commanded by Allah to make the Pharaoh his first addressee... Prpohet Isa ﷺ began his mission by addressing the Rabbis and Pharisees. Likewise, Prophet Nuh ﷺ, Prophet Hud ﷺ, Prophet Shoaib ﷺ—the pattern of address of whom has been mentioned in the Qur'an—began their mission by speaking reason with the men of authority and power of their respective nations and attacking their dogmas and ideologies. The last Prophet to be commissioned, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was instructed to warn his close relatives. These people were the leaders of Arabia's religious and patriarchal society, a position that allowed them to dictate and veer the moral and political thought of all Arabia."[14]

D. Practical Models

An important principle of building public opinion is the 'Principle of Action'. What it means is that people do not take any

interest in an idea which is removed from practice or practical domains. People trust only those ideas which the presenter of the idea himself brings into practice, or which they believe he potentially can, or which the people can themselves bring into practice and vouch for it. Sans a practical working model, no idea is conducive to public opinion.

The principle of action requires that countless practical examples and models of Islamic lifestyle and Islamic values should keep manifesting themselves before the public. In other words, the Muslims should personify Islam by their individual and collective attitude; and make it thus clear that Islam is indeed the truth and it is indeed beneficent to society. The people should be able to understand Islam by looking at the attitude of the addressing person/group. For this, it is necessary that Muslims should not limit themselves to Muslims alone, they should lead an active social life in the country, they should play a proactive role in the concerns of the nation, and they should leave their footprints in the course of this engagement.

Muslim families should interact with non-Muslim families and maintain cordial relations with them, so that they too might witness the merits of Islam's family values with their own eyes. Masajid and madaris have been opening their doors to non-Muslims of late, this practice needs to be promoted on a large scale. Our fellow countrymen should be given an opportunity to attend and witness Islamic programmes like marriage ceremonies, Eid, the activities carried out during the blessed month of Ramadan, Hajj and Umrah training programmes, distribution of *zakat* and fitrah, etc. It is also required that the beneficial aspects of Islamic lifestyle should manifest themselves before fellow Indians from the ramparts of Muslim institutions. Our schools, hospitals, welfare institutions and organisations and their internal environment can act as fertile Islamic oases in an

otherwise desert, whose refreshing breeze, cool shades and sweet water should rejuvenate and replenish every passing traveller. Wherever we have had Islamic microfinance experiments in the country, the feedback has been very encouraging. In the coming days if schemes like Islamic Takaful also become common, they will facilitate the blessings of the Islamic financial and economic system to illuminate the horizon.

These days, media—especially social media—has also been playing an important role in moulding public opinion. Certain events and crises also serve to flip public opinion in no time.

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Public Opinion and the Media

When the power of the media goes up in a society, news and events lose their true perspective. Intellectual deduction and construction of an understanding and opinion is no longer left to the person's own mind, they are surrendered to a foreign and artificial perspective.

No discussion on public opinion can ever be complete without dealing with the role of the media. In order to lead public opinion in the right direction, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the media and also proper attention to it. Media is not a new topic of discussion in our intellectual and ideological circles. But the fact remains that despite having elaborate discussions on this subject, we are yet to adopt a proper approach towards it.

Public Opinion and Media

The importance of the media has been growing exponentially ever since the Industrial Revolution, making it an ever-increasing contributor to determining public opinion. Towards the beginning of this century, it was being said that the seven arms of the media (print, audio, video, cinema, radio, TV, internet and cellphone) had a key role to play in moulding public

opinion. In the past two decades, a new form of media began to take shape. Commonly referred to as social media, this is a colloquial name for the 'Web 2.0' internet applications which allow an ordinary person to develop their own content and freely make it reach their audience. The world is now heading quickly towards eighth arm, stealthily called the 'augmented reality.'[1] With the help of advanced technologies like hologram and hololens, media content is being presented in such a way that it manifests itself as a real life experience to its audience. This virtual world created by the media has an effect on all the five senses of the person concerned, to the point that his subconscious makes him a part of that virtual world.

Right now, the primary effects of this conditioning can be noticed on social media platforms like Instagram. Experts believe that the upcoming augmented reality revolution would be much more captivating than the internet, having profound psychological and social effects.[2] The purpose of discussing these futuristic forms of media is to establish the fact that the media challenge would become much more intense in the coming days, warranting our utmost attention. The task of moulding public opinion on proper lines is an impossible feat without taking into account the power of the media. While this is true even today, it would become all the more crucial in the days ahead.

Social persuasion is the single largest strength of mass media. Media has greatly affected direct social interaction between human beings and made educated individuals extremely lethargic when it collecting and verifying information from direct first hand sources. Man, today, does not even take the effort of personally investigating into the things happening in his backyard, he has made himself dependent upon the media even in mundane affairs. It has become quite common in urban

areas for people to know about murders committed in their neighbour's flat through the daily newspaper or television. Thus, the media has gained an alarming control over what information people should get and what not, which things should be given importance and which ones should not, and what are the topics people should deliberate upon and which ones they should ignore. Consequently, people's opinion and value judgement over what is right and what is wrong, and what is good and what is bad, is being decided by the media. Those who have control over the media can be said to have a licence over controlling public opinion. Before the advent of social media, it was usually the governments and corporate giants who owned the media. Hence, their control over public opinion used to be extremely powerful and sweeping.

Media, in democratic societies, is apparently free. But Noam Chomsky and several other analysts maintain that modern democracies are more draconian in their control over human thought and ideas than any society in ancient history has ever been. For instance, Chomsky has this to say about American media:

> "the US media do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Rather, they permit-indeed, encourage spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalised largely without awareness."[3]

Chomsky has revealed the propaganda model of modern media. He has explained how topics of discussion are cherry-picked to achieve the aforementioned objective, how issues are framed, information is processed, how it is decided which thing needs to be emphasised and highlighted and how select news

is presented in the tone and tenor of one's choice and how it is ensured that debates do not cross the predecided boundries.[4]

When the power of the media goes up in a society, news and events lose their true perspective. Intellectual deduction and construction of an understanding and opinion is no longer left to the person's own mind, they are surrendered to a foreign and artificial perspective. He deduces only those meanings from the news and events which the media wants him to. Thus, despite having complete freedom of will and conscience, his conscience is governed by an external power.

> O Allah, make us see the truth as the truth, and cause us to follow it. And make us see falsehood as falsehood, and cause us to avoid it.

A media-governed society gets deprived of the great power of discretion that has been sought through this prayer.

This extraordinary control over man's information, opinion and conscience is one of the banes of modern culture. Freedom of thought and conscience forms one of the most important foundations of human dignity. Modern culture has put several restrictions upon it, the most important agency of which is the media. What the claws of tyrant rulers of old could not adequately achieve, modern technology—and the media it feeds—has easily accomplished, while ostensibly granting complete liberty to the public.

Media and Cultural Colonialism

It is usually presumed that the assault of media and its control system is limited to transient political matters. Although immediate political and economic interests form important motive of this control system, it also possesses deep ideological and cultural roots. The entire scheme of the media propagates

Western values and philosophy in a very silent and subtle manner. Seemingly innocuous and harmless cartoons meant for child viewership also promote free intermingling of the sexes and casual kissing. Scores of such things intrinsically related to core cultural values are engraved on the innocent subconscious minds of our children. The media's relentless attack on the face veil is used to create a perception that this is a sign of oppression against women and that of male chauvinism. As for Jihad, it has been ingrained in the minds of the public that it is this vital pillar of Islam that is responsible for all cases of terrorism all over the word. In fact, the word Jihad is taken to be another word for terrorism and that' Jihadi' is now systematically made a curse word. The Qur'an tells us that the primary purpose of wearing clothes is to cover our shame. *"O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment."* [Al-A'araf: 26]. But what the media would have us believe is that clothes are meant to expose the skin and flaunt one's status and make a fashion statement. The effect of the media's slow poisoning is that even Muslims affected by it gradually become neglectful of clothing's role in concealing shame, they no longer feel any hesitation in being shameless and semi-nude. Overstepping their cultural frontiers and social boundaries, they are forced to reside in an alien and artificial world created by the media and get influenced by it. The priorities of this alien world with regard to cultural values, political theories, economic pursuits and lifestyle are the same as the culture preferred by the media—the western culture. In our country, our media is doing the same thing to promote and exalt the political and cultural priorities of right-wing elements. In fact, the role played by our media in this regard is far more aggressive, blunt and cruel than that played by the international media. In the coming years,

when augmented reality would manifest itself as the true face of media, we can well imagine how difficult this challenge would turn out to be.

The Qur'an portrays the character of one Nazar ibn Haris, who had resorted to lame entertainment gimmicks to distract people from the truth. *"And of the people is he who buys the amusement of speech to mislead others from the way of Allah without knowledge."* [Luqman: 6] Even a cursory analysis of the entertainment industry would suffice to understand that it is the Nazar ibn Haris of our times. It makes our children dream, but about what? About being a celebrity! Our kids begin seeking their ideals in the film industry and in boxing rings. The lifeless and imaginary characters depicted in cartoons become their icons. This is not an ordinary issue, mind you, it completely offsets the efforts we take in developing our children's personalities.

Several analysts[5] have explained that in most societies, the media also creates an environment of telling lies. People become so used to lies that they get influenced by even those things which they know are lies. Their attitude and approach in life revolves around those lies. Lies are treated as something very normal. While elaborating upon the things that led to the decline of the Children of Israel, the Qur'an says: *"They are fond of listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden."* [Al-Maidah: 42] The superlative degree used in the words employed in this ayah suggest that they used to easily accept falsehood even after knowing it to be such, and that they have become habitual of falsehood. To become so accustomed to listening and accepting lies can only mean the death of a society's collective conscience.

This tells us that the media's influence is not only limited to the fact that we are no longer getting correct news or that some values are getting dishonoured or that public opinion is

being misguided on some matters. Rather, this is paving the way for a complete downward cultural revolution. It is not only changing our thoughts, it is also changing the way we think and see things, it is changing our very perspective and mentality. The ontological and axiological standards are changing. It is affecting the psychology and subconscious mind of the individual and the society. Thus, media is not only influencing public opinion, it is also influencing the paradigms governing public opinion.

This brief analysis is sufficient to prove how important it is to focus on the media if we are to build public opinion on sincere lines. It also tells us that a proper focus on the media necessitates a deeper understanding and planning thereof.

Social Media

Social Media was expected to change this situation. Social Media differs from mainstream media in a number of aspects. The most important point is that it is not under the grip of political or corporate houses the way mainstream media is.

Thirty to forty years ago, Muslims used to lament upon the fact that mass media is under the clutches of giant corporate houses. Capitalist neo-colonialism all over the world feels threatened by Islam. Hence, the world always sees only Islamophobes on their television sets, listens to only them on their radios and reads only their views in newspapers. If Muslims wish to put across their version and ideas, they are unable to match up to the resources of this ubiquitous media. But social media has addressed this long-standing complaint. Gone are the days when the world was divided into media producers and consumers, when the only ones who spoke on the media were certain VIPs while the rest was the general public who only listened, when the ones who wrote were an influential few writers of renown while the rest of the world were only

readers, when a select few produced information while all others were lame consumers. The internet and social media came to end this disparity and proved to be a great leveller. It abolished these distinctions. Now every man has the power of media. Now, the producers of information and media content are no different from its consumers. Every consumer can become a media producer. A housewife can sit in the confines of her house and write things which can make the world sit up and take notice. A school student can make a video on his tablet which can take the world by a storm. Powerful men's press conferences on which they splurge millions can be overshadowed by a poor man's tweet for which he need not spend a penny. A single girl can post something on Facebook and kick off a mass revolution. In this new world, every man is a reporter and an editor. News can no longer be screened or censored. Every man is an analyst and there is no one who can prevent his analysis from getting published. Thus, it has now become almost impossible to put barricades on thoughts and ideas.

With approximately 2.5 billion users, Facebook would well have qualified as the most populated country on earth. Certainly, it has become very easy now to convey our message to a large portion of humankind using this medium. Social media has lent voice to the voiceless. If the message contains substance and is fairly attractive, it has enabled it to spread and influence others, bypassing the need to have a good backing of money and resources. This is a golden opportunity for Islam and its followers. The USP of Muslims is the message they possess. They are the bearers of the divine message, which carries an immense inherent attraction of its own. Social media has multiplied the opportunities we have had to convey this message, opening up the doors to a new world of possibilities. It was hence rightfully hoped that the media landscape with regards to Islam would

now quickly change.

But the situation gradually changed for the worse. We shall explain in the following paragraphs why this hope was shattered. Today, the media perspective regarding Islam has become uglier than ever before, and this is something that calls for our serious attention.

Now, exploitative and colonial powers have started gaining control over social media as well, and they are using various tricks to do so. Even social media and the internet have now become important agents of change in the thought paradigm. Compared to mainstream media, the canvas here is very vast and the possibilities are endless—for both, the ordinary person as well as for the exploitative powers. Fake news, even fake images and videos can very easily be dished out as gospel truths. Perception engineering and perception management are the playgrounds of the internet and social media. Experts in these fields try to impress upon the minds of the masses to serve the business, political and ideological objectives of their clients. Various techniques are employed for the same, and this has become a very lucrative skill indeed.

Islam and Media in the Past Four Decades

The media is at odds with Islam since quite a few years. Edward Said has written on this topic in his enlightening book[6]. He has explained in detail how the media is creating a negative image of Islam all over the world and how millions of people all across the globe are being systematically brainwashed to this end.

A lot has changed in this world since the release of Said's book. The media has since become even more aggressive against Islam. When the internet era began three decades ago, it was hoped that this independent media would allow Muslims to convey the truth in a more effective manner with lesser hurdles

than before, and that they would now be able to succeed in positively influencing public thought and opinion too. And we did get some very encouraging results in the initial few years. However, as days went by, the pro-Islam positive and balanced views gradually began losing steam, while Islamophobic and anti-Islam elements began gaining ground in the discussions on Islam. Today, even the internet and social media have become key platforms of Islamophobia all around the world.[7] How large is the scale of this work and how organised it is are topics which have been explored in several research papers[8]. When we study these papers, we realise that the anti-Islam forces of our country are also marching on similar lines, they are engrossed in building mass public opinion against Islam.

In comparison, the social media activities of Muslims are not only very less and inadequate, they are also very lame and disorganised. A lot of uneducated and unskilled young men who have nothing to do are busy with unimportant things. If there is anything serious work being done on social media, it is mostly made up of apologetic and defensive posts. We are seeing many Muslims who are now fed up of the relentless attacks on Islam and have adopted an apologetic and defensive stand. Trying to justify Islam's core principles, being overwhelmed and overawed to ludicrous extents and being overtly defensive are the telling signs of this reactionary stand. Their apologetic approach—which reaches ridiculous levels—is an insult to the honour of Islam, gives credence to the accusations of anti-Islam elements and harms the cause of Islam. Such views take no time to get viral on the internet.

And we also have those people active on social media who propagate a very extremist interpretation of Islam, something that is alien to the precepts of Islamic law, and display an abject prejudice and intolerance towards creeds other than

their own. Their approach towards non-Muslims is extremely confrontational. Instead of engaging in a dialogue, they believe in a monologue in which they speak out their mind without being considerate towards the views and sentiments of their audience. These people, collectively, interpret Islam in the very same manner that Islamophobes gloat at. They too are, after all, guilty of tarnishing the image of Islam. Instead of veering public opinion in favour of Islam, they create a negative perception of Islam, effectively consolidating the already unfavourable opinion the public has about Islam.

Even a cursory analysis of the internet and social media would suffice in telling us that there are very few sane, constructive and balanced voices that are raised in support of Islam and which present a proper interpretation thereof. Moreover, these sane voices are suppressed beneath the mountain of anti-Islam propaganda and the insane pro-Islam junk referred above. The problems Islamic movements have had to face in some countries of late has had an effect on the internet as well. Scores of websites belonging to Islamic movements have either closed down or have turned dormant. This has come across as a very big challenge for Muslims today. It is incumbent upon us to face it with all our might and to change this situation for the better.

What We Need to Do

The above discussion makes it clear that it is absolutely necessary to make the media a tool to mould public opinion correctly, and we have also learnt that this is a very big challenge nonetheless. We are already running late. The world is moving ahead very fast while we are lagging behind. Whenever one speaks of the media, people talk about launching a channel or publishing a newspaper. Apart from the fact that launching and running a channel or some influential newspaper is an uphill

task in itself, it should be understood that this is just one of the many things that is required of us. There are many other things which can be started immediately and they are quite effective too.

1. The first requirement is that of a skilled workforce. Right now, we need a spectrum of skills to gain an influence over the media. We need people who speak well and write well, people who have a command over various languages. But simply being able to speak or write well is not sufficient, they should also be smart and intelligent enough to know how and when and what to speak. Along with putting across their ideas directly, they should also have the tact to influence minds and thoughts in indirect ways. Modern media calls for modern means of communication. Apart from writing and speaking, effectively employing tools like videos, graphics and memes, and making optimal use of films, cartoons, art, comedy, documentaries, etc. are the skills we require in this field. The glaring truth is that we are lagging behind in all these areas. We need to make a serious effort to develop these skills, to encourage those young men and women who are proficient with these skills and to give them opportunities. We need to ensure that within the next few years we have a commendable team of such media professionals in our ranks.
2. Although all people from all circles of Ummah are becoming active on social media in some form or the other, we lack concerted efforts on this front. We cannot expect seriousness and earnestness in this field unless our leaders focus on it and come to realise that they need to make proper use of this medium to communicate with the citizens of this country. Gone are the days when social media used to be a youth platform. Rulers all over the world, senior leaders, authors and intellectuals, social reformers and religious leaders are active on social media. This platform also plays host to serious ideological discussions and debates. But when we run a glance over the media and social media activities of Islamic preachers and religious and social leaders, we come across a very depressing and disturbing picture. Twitter, which is

considered the most important platform for serious discussions and moulding public opinion, has seen almost zero presence of our senior Muslim leaders. The youth is certainly making attempts, and some are indeed very good at it. We are grateful to them. But until those people who command an influential position among the masses and hold sway over public opinion become active, we cannot expect anything worthwhile to happen. From them only we expect to properly guide the youth who are active on this front either.

3. One crucial issue revolves around the tone and tenor of the comments posted on social media. It is now an established fact of communication science that in some situations, discussions and debates lead to the consolidation of the opponent's views instead of changing them. In social psychology parlance, this is called 'attitude polarisation,' which basically means that both confronting groups become so rigid in their respective views that each group starts interpreting every event as per its own point of view. Not only does this make it impossible for them to engage in any meaningful dialogue, but every argument presented by one group only serves to reinforce the contradictory view of the other group.[9] Protests against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) strengthen the opinions of the anti-CAA group that CAA is wrong. And as the protests surge, the opinion of pro-CAA groups keeps gravitating in favour of CAA, claiming that it is in the absolute interest of the nation! This is the very situation Islam is facing all over the world, and especially so in this country of ours. This is the reason why communal forces are hell bent upon provoking Muslims to take up an extremist stand, tone and tenor. The terser the language Muslims use, the more benefits they would reap. We need to understand that although adopting a terse attitude in such situations does give vent to our emotions and allows us to gain the support and sympathy of our like-minded brethren, it can never fulfil the objective of impressing upon public opinion. This does not mean that the

Muslims should keep quiet or adopt an apologetic or defensive stand, what they need to do is to gain a proper understanding of this issue and adopt a style of debate which allays this attitude polarisation. We shall discuss a suitable style and approach on a later date, for it is beyond the scope of our current topic.

4. There is such a huge diversity of thoughts and ideas and community interests in our country that a single language or discourse is not at all sufficient to influence the public opinion of the entire nation. We have studies in communication science which suggest that the hallmark of 21st century media is 'demassification'[10]. This means that instead of addressing the entire population all at once, the media separately addresses each section of the population.

The change in the media's approach in this regard over the past few years is quite astonishing. Earlier, the entire nation was addressed as a whole, a single unit. This was referred to as 'broadcasting.' This was followed by an era in which the media focussed on 'narrowcasting,' in which they segregated the population into various groups and addressed each group in a tailor-made fashion. The kids were addressed separately, women separately, villagers separately, city-dwellers separately, each ideological group separately, every caste and social class separately. Moreover, the English newspaper of a publication house has a policy which is altogether different from the Hindi newspaper it publishes, which in turn is entirely different from the policy of its Urdu newspaper. The media is now moving towards a strategy which communication scientists refer to as 'hyper-personalisation.' In other words, customised media content is designed to suit the interest, taste and temperament of each and every individual. Nicholas Negroponte (MIT Media Lab founder) had long predicted that the media would soon supply a 'Daily Me' to each and every person.[11] This prediction is getting

fulfilled in all pomp and glory, and it is expected that in the near future—i.e., in the upcoming era of augmented reality—this phenomenon would assume overwhelming proportions.

On the one hand, we have this scenario in which every person is being seen as an audience on an individual basis, while on the other hand we have Muslim writers and speakers who consider everyone but their own either 'Hindu' or 'fellow countrymen.' The farthest they have gone to break this binary is to distinguish between Sanghis and non-Sanghis. Even right-wing is not a monolithic block, it has people subscribing to thoughts and ideas of varying intensities. The so-called secular class, too, has various streams of thought. Then we also have countless social groups of dalits, adivasis and other deprived castes, each having varying thought processes. Without understanding this fact in due detail, we can neither formulate a proper media strategy, nor can we attain any success in moulding public opinion. We find this problem even with members of Islamic movements—they cannot discern where to say what. Even internal closed circle speeches meant for the cadre are posted on social media platforms. This is a clear sign of an abject lack of narrowcasting sense.

The first requirement of narrowcasting and hyper-personalisation is that we need to gain a keen understanding of not only the thoughts of our addressee, but also their emotions. We need to develop the skill of thinking from their perspective. A thorough study of various social groups and their respective ideologies, their history, their belief systems, their rites and rituals, their social standing, their political and social movements in the recent past and their current political, social, spiritual and cultural associations is very much required. These days, the analyses and discussions posted on social media also

help us in understanding these things. If we spare some time and pay careful attention to the comment section of our own posts, assign various compartments to those presenting their analysis and grade them as per their thoughts and emotions, we would be able to gain a better insight into the minds of our addressees.

(March 2020)

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The Post-COVID Scenario and The Islamic Message

This pandemic has taught us earthlings a great lesson that the lives of seven billion people are linked to each other and dependent upon each other. We are all children of the same father and mother. We all have shared interests.

Now, when the entire world is discussing the destructive trail left by the COVID-19 pandemic and strategies to contain it, another important topic that warrants a discussion is the post-COVID scenario. There can be no doubt that the post-COVID world would be a new world altogether. Global order would take a new shape, ideas and ideologies would be deconstructed and constructed anew, paradigms would get revised, the foundations of ideological systems would shake, civilisations would take on new forms,, new forces would emerge, new trends would prosper, and utterly new lifestyles would unfold.

Journey of civilisations is nothing but the journey of sparks emerging from the ashes of great adversities. Many decisive stages of history owe their existence to the deluge of apocalyptic calamities. These storms leave behind a completely changed world

in their aftermath. Societies and civilisations are reconstructed. The brick and mortar that is used to reconstruct society is always provided by thoughts and ideas. Hence, new thoughts and ideas are required for the construction of a new society. Even now, i.e., after COVID-19, human intellect and wisdom is being challenged by a mountain of problems and challenges. New thoughts and ideas would keep pouring in to solve these issues, and a new world would arise from the womb of this storm.

Past Pandemics and Their Effects

What would happen after this pandemic? And how severe would its effects be on our world? In order to understand this, a brief examination of past pandemics will be helpful.. The Bubonic plague that had spread in Europe in the 14th Century CE (1347-1350 CE) was one such debilitating pandemic in recorded human history that had left an indelible mark on human life. It is estimated that a third to half of Europe's population succumbed to this plague. There were certain towns and villages in which the plague claimed 80-85% of its inhabitants. It affected each and every aspect of European life. The labour population declined sharply, and landlords could not find people to till their lands. Consequently, the entire system of landlordism took a blow. This led to research into new and modern means of production and industry, paving the way for machines to take over, eventually culminating into the Industrial Revolution. People lost faith in the traditional superstitious healing methods which were being practised in Europe at that time. European doctors turned to the treatises of Muslim physicians like Avicenna, laying the foundations of modern medical science. People rose in rebellion against the archaic and irrational dogma of the Church. This led to religious reformist movements like Protestantism on the one hand, and the rise of modern secular movements on the other,

which sought to curtail the role of Church and religion in the public domain. There are many historians who believe that the 14th Century Bubonic plague has been a major precursor to European Renaissance and Modernism.

Likewise, there was another terrible pandemic exactly a century back (1919-1920). It was an influenza which went by the name Spanish Flu. Fifty to hundred million people succumbed to this flu and lost their lives, which accounted for 2.5-5% of the then global population. Young men (aged between 20 and 40 years) were most affected by this flu. A large proportion of bread earners was wiped out.[1] This pandemic had an effect on the outcome of World War I. It made it easier for Fascism and Nazism to proliferate in Italy and Germany. It spurred many a development in medical science and initiated the systems of international cooperation in public health in the form of the League of Nations' Health Organisation.

The way in which various aspects of human life have been upended in the aftermath of this COVID-19 pandemic only serves to reaffirm the historical fact that pandemics have a profound effect on human life, giving birth to a new world. But this process of global resurrection is not an easy one. It is expected that quite a few ideas and ideologies that prevail today would have to endure some rough weather. The evil forces which have turned this world into a living hell would try to exploit this situation as well. Muslims need to play an active role in this scenario, and see to it that this world changes for the better. We need to ensure that the new culture and civilisation that would now come into existence confirms to the commands and wishes of the Lord and Creator of this world, so that we might lead ourselves into a more pure, more just, more humane, morally richer, more responsible, and most importantly, a more God-conscious global society.

Post-COVID Scenario: The Possibilities Under Discussion:

How would the world be post the COVID-19 pandemic? A lot is being spoken about this. Everyone agrees on at least this part that it would be a phase of severe economic crisis. How long would this economic crisis last is anyone's guess, but for a short interval of say a year or two, the world and its inhabitants would have to face many financial challenges. It is the poor man who is most affected by economic crises. It is expected that poverty, hunger and starvation would see a spike. These are usually fertile grounds for mass revolutions and change. We do not know what form or kind of revolution would follow this pandemic.

The modern liberal capitalist lobby would face the toughest time in its history. Countries would move towards a more stable and stronger economy. Free trade would become more and more difficult. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its global agreements were already faltering, their future would become more uncertain now. Government interference would increase. Some governments have already curtailed civil liberties under the pretext of imposing lockdowns, they would probably tighten their hold. They can use advanced technology to track their citizens and restrict their rights.

This is what is being commonly said. Without delving any deeper into these suspicions, we shall move on to those things that we feel should be the goal taken up by Muslims and the things they need to attempt. If a serious effort is made, and Allah is with us in our endeavour, we have plenty of opportunities to see our plan succeed.

Towards a Theistic Worldview

The most important and fundamental attempt should be to make this world more serious about God, to turn it from an

agnostic worldview to a more theistic worldview. The second decade of the 21st Century has been marked by spectacular human development. Human lifestyle, and the beauty and grandeur of human society, its pomp and glory has reached amazing heights. The comforts and luxuries that are available to a common man today could not be enjoyed by the mightiest monarchs of yore. Modern man used to pelf up with pride looking at these advancements. He took this as man's victory over nature. These arts and sciences, and the arrogance that they led to, plunged him into a state wherein he began getting neglectful of God and religion. For the 21st century man and civilisation, material progress became synonymous with success. All their wishes and desires and efforts and endeavours were directed at amassing more and more wealth, and nothing else. This pandemic beat this arrogance to dust. It showed him what worth all his progress and achievements have before the limitless power and authority of God Almighty.

> "O people, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never be able to create as much as a fly, even if they all gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a tiny thing, they would never be able to recover it from it. Weak are the pursuer and the pursued." [Al-Hajj: 73]

This ayah basically speaks of the helplessness of false deities. The contemporary man came up with some new gods to worship. Subconsciously, yes, but he committed the grave mistake of treating his knowledge and expertise and civilisational power as his god. A small virus was roped in to show him the true worth of his knowledge and expertise. He was shown how, at the command of God Almighty, the smallest and most insignificant of His creatures, an invisible virus, can render

the entire mankind helpless. How the biggest of companies, academic and research institutes, glittering shopping malls, bustling entertainment zones, splendid airports and ostentatious hotels can all turn into lifeless buildings by a single gesture of the Almighty. How we can lose control of our entourage and retinue of servants in no time. How the privilege and luxury of ordering whatever we want online, of booking cabs online, and many such privileges which are seen as wonders of human innovation and invention, can get suspended all of a sudden. This pandemic has taught us that even the most powerful of men may have to suffer from pain, solitude and helplessness

These days, the entire world appears to lean towards religion, spirituality and a revival of moral values. This is in sync with human nature. *"Say, have you considered, if there came to you the punishment of Allah or there came to you the Hour, is there anyone other than Allah you would invoke?"* [Al-An'am: 40] Preachers of Islam ought to use this crisis as an opportunity to turn mankind towards Allah.

In the present context, it is important to make the entire world understand, employing all our strengths and resources, that man cannot live in ease while ignoring the greatest truth of this universe. The key lesson that we learn from this situation is that we need to turn to our Creator. We need to understand what He wants from us. We need to understand His signs and His warnings in all earnest. This is the time to proclaim, *ila rabbika farghab* (so turn to your Lord), and to call upon people to *fa firru ilallah, inni lakum minhu nazeerun mubeen* (so flee towards Allah, indeed, I am a clear warner to you from Him) with all the strength we can muster.

The Correct Point of View Regarding Science and Knowledge

When man becomes ignorant of Allah's commands and

teachings, he deviates from the balanced path and falls prey to extremism. On the one hand, we have those who wish to turn a blind eye to the *sunnah* of God Almighty. They do not want to believe in established scientific facts. Going past the means, they tend to rely only on prayers and supplications to ward off all evil. Islam has got nothing to do with such an approach and attitude. Even the Prophets of Allah took medicines to cure themselves, they adopted the means and resources available during their respective ages, took necessary precautions, collected war intelligence, tried to equip themselves and their followers with the latest tools, and trained and organised their forces. In short, they embraced all those means of success which are considered 'worldly' or 'material.' And after doing everything they could, they turned to Allah, supplicated to Him and beseeched His help. Likewise, they adopted all the means available to them in their time to restrict the spread of epidemics. This is what Islam teaches us, and this is its philosophy. Islam does not ask us to forsake science and intellect. Instead, it asks us to think, reason and employ available resources.

On the other extreme, we have those people who regard their means, science, knowledge and expertise as the alpha and omega. They have made their civilisational resources their god. They are so much in awe of its powers that they neglect Allah. They feel that since they have control over the means, they do not require anything else. Allah does not like such arrogance one bit. The agnostic and atheist ideologies that are in vogue today are rooted in this very arrogance. The materialistic wave of the 18th and 19th centuries created an illusion that we have deciphered all the secrets of nature, and all the truths have been bared. Whatever is left would also soon be discovered. We would then rule over nature and all its powers.

In 1948, the then US Secretary of State, George Marshall, had announced that we shall very soon eliminate infective diseases from the face of the earth. While speaking to the Congress in 1969, American Surgeon General William Stewart said that it is time all books on infective diseases be closed shut, and that we have now won the war against epidemics. The most interesting prediction at the international level is that which had been made by scientists in the year 1990. It is called the 'Delphi Health Forecast—1990.' Expert scientists from all over the world had unanimously declared that diseases would be wiped off the earth by the year 2020.[2] What a great irony it is that Allah has chosen the same 2020 to unleash the worst pandemic the world has ever seen!

These are those two extremes that have plagued mankind—superstition and occultism on one end, and materialism and an arrogant neglect of the greatest reality of the universe, i.e., the Allah Almighty, on the other.

Islam's balanced middle path teaches us to optimally employ all possible means and resources and use the knowledge and intellect Allah has given us to the utmost, and then turn to God Almighty. When we come across an incident, we should take into account its logical and scientific aspects as well as its spiritual and supernatural ones. While we should indeed focus on solving the issue at hand using modern research and studies and means and resources, we should also seek divine help, introspect and repent to Him and plead for His mercy. We firmly believe that the mightiest of powers are helpless before Allah. All the forces and laws of nature are subject to Allah's commands. The Islamic philosophy of knowledge is that this vast universe of ours, the meticulous balance we find in it, and the laws that govern it, they all point towards a higher truth—the existence of the Creator. The final say of this universe does not belong to

matter or energy or physical laws, it belongs to the Creator of this universe.

Hence, it naturally follows that our actual bond and relation should be with God Almighty, who is the Lord and Creator of all human beings. But God Himself has made certain laws to govern the functioning of this universe. And God Himself has commanded us to abide by His *sunnah*, i.e., the laws of nature, and to make use of the available means and resources.

This is the very nature of Islam. This is the balance that the world needs right now. The current global scenario offers the perfect opportunity to practically present Islam's balanced point of view.

Individualism vs. Social Capital and Human Dignity, Control vs. Mutual Cooperation

Of the several curses modernism has plunged human beings into, one important curse is that of misplaced individualism. What began with human liberty and the fight against state oppression has now snowballed into a state where the concept of social responsibility of the individual has been befogged, and all kinds of moral and social restrictions are seen as antithetical to individual freedom. Right now, the protests that are being held against the mandatory use of facemasks in the USA and certain European countries owe their ideological source to this extremist interpretation of the concepts of individual freedom.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have state machineries becoming so pervasive, intrusive and even hallowed in some countries that they have gained divine status and assumed the role of a secular god.

Islam has shown us the balanced path between individualism and social responsibility. It has granted the

individual his freedom, dignity and rights and given due respect to his privacy, and at the same time it has also ingrained in him a sense of social responsibility. He is accountable for his responsibilities towards his family, his neighbourhood, his society and his Lord and Creator. If and when required, he is expected to sacrifice his freedom, his interests and even his life for their sake.

On the one hand, this pandemic created such an environment of self-centredness and selfishness that people were not even willing to perform the last rites of their own family members, while on the other hand, the world also witnessed spectacles of selflessness in which followers of Islam the world over put their lives on the line to save the lives of fellow human beings, catered to the needs of the hungry, helpless and deprived, and even carried the bodies of the deceased to their final destinations with all due honour and respect. The entire world stood up and took notice of these noble gestures. From Muslim doctors to social workers to even ordinary Muslim men and women—every section of the Muslim community presented an exemplary and distinguished model which personified universal brotherhood, their sense of responsibility towards fellow human beings and their willingness to prefer the larger social good over their own personal interests. All this was indeed a result of Islamic teachings.

This pandemic has taught us earthlings a great lesson that the lives of seven billion people are linked to each other and dependent upon each other. We are all children of the same father and mother. We all have shared interests. A single diseased person—whether rich or poor, whether or not belonging to our own religion and caste—threatens the health of all the people of the world. The Qur'an says: *"He who saves the life of a single person*

has given life to all mankind." [Al-Maidah: 32] This pandemic has reminded us of this pristine truth. Since the disease spread rapidly day by day and by the hour, we could notice it and were alerted by it. We began worrying about saving even the poorest of our lot, regardless of their religion, caste and nationality. How I wish we could all realise that all other aspects of our lives are also intertwined in like manner! We cannot remain permanently at ease while depriving and suppressing a large section of society. We cannot lead a leisurely life by pushing others in the dungeons of misery and contempt. Human existence is hinged upon the precondition that every human being enjoys peace and security, everyone's needs are fulfilled, everyone's rights are safeguarded and every person is granted freedom and dignity.

In the coming months, we would have heated discussions on what role governance models have had to play in controlling this pandemic. Some people believe that China's success in curbing this pandemic can be traced back to its strict state control. But democratic countries like New Zealand, Denmark, Germany and Taiwan have fared far better than China is stemming the tide of this pandemic in their respective countries. The actual determining factor is not whether a country is democratic or not, rather, those countries which have been citizen-friendly, where the citizens trust their governments, and where there has been better coordination among the various classes of society (or in modern parlance, whose social capital has been better) have found it easier to tackle this menace.

In the backdrop of the prevailing scenario, it becomes all the more convenient to convey and propagate Islamic teachings about human dignity, social responsibility and cordial inter-personal relations.

Economic Justice

Despite possessing all possible financial resources, the world economy has come to a standstill. A terrible economic crisis lurks round the corner. It is peculiar to our times that, thanks to crony capitalism, economic disparity has been stretched to its limits. It is the first time in history that all the money of the world has got concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few. In the past 40 years, a mere 0.1% of the global population has gained control over more than half the wealth of the world. It is being said that the poor getting poorer and the wealthy getting wealthier has become the defining aspect of our generation. The world over, governments are adopting policies which rob the poor people of even the humble bread they eat to fill the coffers of the wealthy. Today, millions of people are suffering from thirst and starvation. In the midst of this debilitating pandemic too, the poor people are being ignored with absolute disregard. This is happening not only in India, but in almost all developing countries across the world. The Qur'an says:

> "As for man, when his Lord tries him with honour and gifts, he says (puffed up), 'My Lord has honoured me.' But when He tries him by restricting his subsistence from him, then he says (in despair), 'My Lord has humiliated me.' Nay, nay! But you honour not the orphans, nor do you encourage one another to feed the poor. And you devour inheritance—all with greed, and you love wealth with immense love." [Al-Fajr: 15-20]

Obsessive love for wealth, having contempt for the poor and deprived, plundering the resources of the world which are the common assets of all human beings, and the control of all the wealth of the world falling into the hands of a few wealthy men—all these vices invite disaster and mayhem. The New York Times published a report on the 15th of March this year in which

economic disparity had been identified as a major contributing factor to the spread of this pandemic. Scientific data has been tabled in this report to claim that had the economic disparity not been as severe as it is today, this pandemic would not have spread with such vigour.

A major cause of this economic disparity is the liberal policy under the garb of which governments are washing their hands off public welfare projects and delegating their responsibilities to the market, i.e., the market capitalists. The privatisation of crucial sectors like education and public health is depriving the poor people of even basic and essential facilities. The blow dealt by the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the fact that the resplendent market that has come up on the foundations of capitalism can serve us only in our good times. In the first phase of the pandemic itself, corporate hospitals all over the country downed their shutters, their doctors went missing, and all the burden was borne by the weak and feeble infrastructure of government hospitals. This has shown us that all the needs of human society cannot be fulfilled by profit-oriented establishments alone. Profit does not seem too alluring in the face of death. Hence, the corporate tendency of turning basic human needs into a 'commodity' can spell disaster for human society!

Environmental Crisis

Allah has granted human beings all that they require to lead a good life. But the unbridled lust for luxuries, coupled with the capitalist system, has pillaged the resources of this planet to such an extent that our air, water and environment have been rendered polluted. Numerous studies have shown that ecological imbalance is one important reason why viruses and bacteria like the Novel Corona Virus endanger human lives at regular

intervals. Most diseases are arising from biodiversity hotspots, and it is said that the prime reason behind it is the industrial activity carried out by human beings in those areas and gross interference in the ecological balance. Because of this ecological disturbance, microorganisms which were hitherto found only in animals are now infecting human beings too, causing new diseases to spread among us. *"Corruption has appeared on the land and the sea because of what that the hands of human beings have earned, so that Allah may give them a taste of some of their deeds, in order that they may turn back."* [Ar-Rum: 41]

This pandemic has taught us many a lesson on the need to bring about a change in our attitude. By depriving us of a number of comforts and luxuries for a few days, God has made us realise that there are very few things that we actually need in this world. Gandhi had famously said that "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

Allah had told us to *"Eat and drink, but do not indulge in excesses"* [Al-A'araf: 31] and *"Do not exceed limits, for God does not like those who exceed limits"* [Al-An'am: 141]. This pandemic has reminded us all that we had unreasonably exceeded the sphere of our needs. This greed and avarice had led to economic disparity, and it also wreaked havoc with our ecological balance, and it is this very greed that led to this unparalleled evil which we have mentioned above. This lockdown has compelled us to revisit the list of our needs and taught us to lead simple lives. If we were to indeed learn from this natural lesson, it is hoped that many a human issue would be resolved. But in order to learn and understand this lesson, we need to first understand who the Creator of this world and universe is, and we then need to turn towards Him.

It is essential to the objective of the Muslim Ummah,

and it is also the call of history's most vulnerable period, that we raise these topics of discussion and turn the attention of the world to the unseen moral roots of this pandemic. Human conscience has become more receptive and attentive. It is the responsibility of those who believe in Allah and His words to approach humanity's awakened conscience and strive to make this pandemic the starting point towards a positive change.

(August 2020)

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3

Facing the Challenges

Financial Crisis and Our Responsibility

Crony capitalism has become a pain in the neck all through the world. The oligarchy of a few big companies and their nexus with politicians closes the doors of progress for all other companies. This pulls down the overall growth and puts the brakes on development. Our country, it seems, is going through this very problem right now.

The country is reeling under a huge financial crisis. The gross domestic product (GDP) growth figures that surfaced at the end of August 2019 shocked the entire nation. A nation that was vying to become a $5 trillion economy in the next few years could muster only 5% growth. Experts suspect that this 5%, too, is an exaggeration. They have had reservations with the new series of calculating GDP that has been promoted in the country, which makes them believe that the actual GDP growth is far less than 5%. Agricultural growth has slid to 2%, while growth in the manufacturing sector has tumbled down to almost nil (0.6%). The unemployment rate has breached the 6% mark, and it is touching 8% in urban areas. This is the worst unemployment rate recorded in the past forty five years. The automobile industry is going through its

most critical phase in history, sales have plummeted by 40%. Major companies like Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland have had to shut their plants. This industry contributes to 49% of the nation's manufacturing GDP, providing employment to about three and a half crore people in some way or the other. About twelve to thirteen lakh people have been rendered jobless in the automobile sector alone. Sales in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector have witnessed an alarming decline. Even giants like Hindustan Unilever, Britannia and Dabur are feeling the heat, they have been forced to cut down on their production. About thirteen lakh freshly constructed houses and residential apartments lie vacant all across the country for want of buyers. The construction sector supports about two hundred and fifty other industries (from steel and cement to paint and furniture). All these industries are facing the brunt of this financial crisis.

These facts and figures should suffice to give us an idea of how the financial collapse and sudden rise of unemployment is becoming increasingly worrisome. Loss of employment has become a common issue in urban households, but the condition is far worse in the rural hinterlands. The markets bear a desolate look. Even those markets and shopping malls which used to witness heavy footfalls have suddenly turned silent. Sale and purchase of land has come to a standstill. Prices of gold have skyrocketed, leading to a drop in its purchase as well.

This financial situation has undoubtedly affected millions of our countrymen. The condition of the poor has especially deteriorated, and it is feared that their condition could worsen further. If the situation continues at this pace, it would lead to widespread unrest. Our country has a sizeable proportion of youths, and every year about two crore young men and women enter the job market in search of employment. That means, number of new entries into employment market is at par with

the entire population of Australia. Economic recession and the resultant unemployment crisis are a lethal combination for a country like ours. Experts call it a demographic disaster. If this large number of youngsters do not get employed then the impending economic depression would lead to many a social issue, breeding racism, communalism, civil war and chaos. This matter, therefore, needs to be seriously addressed.

Contributing Factors: Experts' Opinion

What has led to this situation? Experts seem to be divided into two camps on this issue. In the first, we have the government and its supporters who refuse to accept it as a crisis at all. When asked about the decline in growth, they explain that it is nothing but a 'cyclic slowdown.' In a capitalist economy, periods of fast-paced growth and stagnation follow each other in cycles. In their opinion, this, too, is a period or cycle, which would soon be followed again by a period of fast-paced growth. Certain other people associate it with global recession. According to them, the economic crisis in the USA, the trade war between USA and China which has resulted in a decline in Chinese exports and growth rate, the debt crisis in China, recession in Germany, Brexit, etc. have affected our country's exports and in turn our country's economy. Thus, this state sponsored narrative holds only foreign factors responsible for our economic problems.

But this narrative is both weak and baseless. This crisis is not a cyclic phenomenon, but a structural one. In other words, it is related to the government's economic policies. Despite the global recession, the economies of most third world countries did not show any decline. Our own neighbour, Bangladesh, has been developing at a commendable rate. Moreover, the global recession was far worse in 2008, but our country remained untouched by its negative effects. The current crisis is not related to our exports, figures tell us that there has been no significant fall in exports.

The roots of this crisis lie in the fall in domestic demand, the global economic recession cannot be made a scapegoat to save our skins.

The second camp belongs to those experts who subscribe to the opposition. The most explicit and important analysis has been presented by former prime minister and renowned economist, Dr. Manmohan Singh, in his video lecture. In his analysis, he lays the entire burden of the financial crisis on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government's myopic measures like demonetisation and the hurried and unplanned imposition of Goods and Services Tax (GST). Although the 5-point programme of economic revival proposed by the former prime minister (PM) (which would be discussed in the next pages) has some very pertinent points, the way in which the entire blame has been transferred on a few imprudent decisions and measures of the BJP government makes one feel that this is more of a vindictive political statement than an earnest economic analysis. There is no doubt about the fact that demonetisation was indeed a disastrous decision which wreaked havoc with the country's economy. Likewise, the hasty and unplanned manner in which the GST was imposed did affect all sectors of the economy. But it is also true that these steps only aggravated the crisis. The root causes of this crisis are the capitalist policies which have been adopted under international colonial pressure. These policies had already been adopted by the previous government, the incumbent government only carried it forward with added vigour, in an attempt to woo international neo-colonialists and our own capitalists back home. We shall analyse these policies in brief and make it evident how Islam's guidelines on finance can solve these issues. We shall also elaborate upon the role Muslims are expected to play.

Factors Contributing to the Financial Crisis

Let us first discuss the factors that have led to this crisis:

1. Anti-Poor Economic Policies

The policies that have been adopted by our country since quite a few decades have been directed at the welfare of a handful of capitalists and not the general public at large. Even today, more than half of our population depends upon agriculture for its livelihood, but the government has persistently been displaying criminal negligence towards agriculture in the policies it has adopted. This is because agriculture is not something that the capitalists would be interested in. The second most important source of employment and income is retail. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail, the entry of giant corporate chains and the promotion of online shopping have led to massive loss of employment in this sector too. The third largest sector is that of manufacturing, providing employment to millions of labourers. This sector, too, has been adversely affected. The country's corporate giants have their eyes on the service sector and the government's big infrastructure projects, contracts for which they easily procure for themselves by lobbying with the government. It is not surprising then that the government has also focussed on these sectors alone. These are those sectors which do not employ the common man on a large scale. While this does benefit the capitalists and increases the GDP, it does not generate employment at large scale. In a country populated by 1.4 billion people, the government should focus on those labour intensive sectors which generate mass employment. The informal economy has a major role to play in a poor country like India. A large portion of the country's economy belongs to this category, and it is this category that generates the most employment. Another important advantage of the informal economy is that thanks to it, our country does not get affected by fluctuations in the international financial markets, global

recession, etc. However, this informal sector was undermined in order to fill the coffers of corporate giants. Consequently, poverty and unemployment kept getting worse, and the entire economy feel into the hands of global capitalists, rendering it vulnerable to global market fluctuations.

It is the result of these policies that we have a huge economic disparity between the rich and the poor despite witnessing economic growth. The report Oxfam had released earlier this year states that the richest 1% population of our country owns three quarters (73%) of the nation's wealth, up from 58% last year. This means that within a span of a year, these wealthy people collectively added twenty one lakh crore rupees to their income, and they now own an additional 15% of the country's assets. In contrast, the 50% poorest population of the country (i.e., 67 crore people) collectively owns only 2% of the country's wealth. Our country is among those very few countries in this world with the most economic disparity, and this disparity is rapidly growing with every passing day. It is for this reason that despite having unprecedented wealth generation in the past ten years, we have not been able to utilise this wealth in the alleviation of poverty, nor have we been able to solve our financial problems.

When the common man loses his employment, his purchasing power also declines. This leads to a fall in demand in the market. When all the wealth gets concentrated in the hands of a handful of capitalists, the common folk can neither purchase cars nor can they dream of a house. Why, they find it difficult to spend on soaps and biscuits as well! This creates a gloom in the market, allowing recession to set in. The current crisis is a classic example. Everyone agrees on this point that the current recession is due to low demands. In order to increase demand, it is necessary to put money in the hands of the common man (and

not just the capitalist few). It is for this reason that Dr. Manmohan Singh had spoken about increasing the spending capacity of the common man in his second and fourth points—i.e., to develop the agri-economy and rural consumerism, and to promote those industries which are labour intensive.

Islam does believe in development, but that development is subject to certain conditions. Just as communism gives the slogan of equality, and the slogan of capitalism is liberty and growth, Islam's slogan is justice. Justice includes equality, liberty and growth, but these values are not unrestrained, they lie within the confines of justice. Capitalism puts forth capital and financial growth ahead of human beings. Islam, on the other hand, prioritises human beings, while capital and financial growth are merely meant to serve man. Hence, it places humanity and its needs ahead of development and growth.

Allah says:

> "What Allah has bestowed on His Messenger from the people of the townships belongs to Allah, to His Messenger and his kindred and to the orphans, the needy and the wayfarer—so that it should not merely make a circuit between the wealthy among you." [Al-Hashr: 7]

This means that an important objective of economic policy ought to be that wealth should not keep exchanging hands between the rich alone, it should get transferred from the rich to the poor. In order to ensure this, Islam has prohibited interest, obligated *zakat* and instituted laws of inheritance among other things. It is the responsibility of the government to not only implement these, but also regulate taxes, its spending and subsidies and its general developmental policies in a way that wealth moves from the rich to the poor and ensure equitable distribution of wealth and resources. Unlike Communism, Islam does not espouse an unjust idea of equality, but by means

of proper policy measures, it does seek to eradicate inequality and disparity as much as possible.

Islam exhorts its followers to help those who remain poor even after these welfare policies with their charities. It has a meticulous institution of *zakat* in place. The system of *zakat* ensures that the poor also have money, and they too have some spending capacity. We notice that even poor people purchase new clothes during Ramadan. They spend on their families on Eid. Thus, the culture of *zakat* and charities makes it certain that demand always remains teeming in the market, and that the market never succumbs to recession. In the system of *zakat* Allah has designed has inherent elements that ease the economic disparity and increase the spending capacity of all sections of society in a miraculous way. A few years back, in 2013, renowned French economist, Thomas Piketty had written a book which led to an uproar in the world of economics. This book, 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century,' gained fair renown and remained the bestseller for quite a few years. In this book, Piketty has tried to explore the reasons for growing economic disparity all over the world. He concludes that when the rate of return of capital becomes more than the country's rate of growth, the wealth gets concentrated in the hands of a few rich men which form 1% to 10% of the entire population. The more the difference between the rate of return of capital and the rate of growth, the more would be the rate at which wealth gets concentrated in the hands of the richest few. The solution to such concentration of wealth and resultant economic disparity that Piketty has proposed is very similar to *zakat*. He has proposed that in addition to the existing income tax, the assets of the individual should also be taxed so that the return should somewhat decline, and difference between the rate of return of capital and the rate of growth comes down, until the latter surpasses the former. This is exactly what

zakat does. It is interesting that the tax proposed by Piketty on assets is also almost the same as that of *zakat*, he proposes 2%, while the rate of *zakat* is 2.5%.

2. Interest-based Economy

The second cause of this crisis is the dependence of the economy on interest-based loans. Phases of recession and growth are the hallmark of interest-based economies. The modern interest-based capitalist economy is under the cruel control of interest and interest rates. The entire economy revolves around interest. Interest-based loans are actually a manifestation of the deceitful and abhorrent nature of the capitalist regime. This regime entices people to spend more than they earn, leading to undue consumption. When the person does not have money left with him to splurge, this regime lays down an extensive trap of interest-based loans. When money accumulates in the banks, they tend to lend as much as possible. They begin lending money at low interest rates and minimum conditions. People take these loans and purchase whatever they desire. As a result, the demand witnesses an unnatural surge. In order to meet this inflated demand, companies borrow money to increase their production. This leads to a growth phase. This phase peaks in a very short time before interest begins showing its true colours, after which it is necessarily followed by the other phase.

The increase in demand leads to an increase in prices. Increase in spending and production leads to an increase in the demand for more loans. When people begin spending more than what is required, their savings get depleted. This paucity of savings leads to a paucity of capital with the banks. This paucity of capital (savings) and increase in the demand for loans leads to an increase in interest rates.

As soon as the interest rate goes up, the entire process gets

reversed. Increase in prices and increase in the rate of interest prevents people from taking further loans or splurging anymore, leading to depression and apprehension. Consequently, people begin saving (withholding) money. The demand goes down. The production of companies also goes down. Employment opportunities start getting depleted. This is called the phase of recession. This cyclic pattern of growth and recession is an essential part of interest dynamics. A paper presented by Nobel Prize winning economist, Milton Friedman, was accepted very well in Islamic finance circles. He had written,

> "What accounts for this unprecedented erratic behaviour of the US economy? The answer that leaps to mind is the corresponding erratic behaviour of interest rate."

Even those industries which generate high profits do not do so at all times. Especially during times of recession, if the expected profit is less than the rate of interest, no businessman would take the risk of selling his product. Consequently, they keep waiting for higher profits and the capital keeps stagnating. This phenomenon is called 'Stagflation.' This phenomenon is also one of the hallmarks of the interest-based regime. Stagflation accentuates recession and the entire economy gets paralysed.

The past 10-12 years of our country's economic history also confirms these dynamics. When the economy was on the upswing, the banks lured the people into borrowing huge sums of money. When the demand for interest rose, financial institutions began fishing for fresh loan candidates. Greedy for interest, the banks convinced them to borrow more money than they could require. Then, the banks resorted to shadow banking to disburse even more loans. Accordingly, in the past ten years, the personal loans disbursed by our banks rose from eight lakh crore to twenty one lakh crore. These personal loans form 11% of

our GDP today, which is alarming for a poor country like India. It is a given fact that when personal loans increase, recession lurks around the corner.

When the growth got affected, the banking sector found itself in the line of fire. The situation today is that our country's banking system is facing the worst crisis of the world. Bad debts have increased to eleven lakh crore. Our Non-performing Assets (NPA, or those bank loans which are difficult to recover) have brought us in the ranks of Greece and Italy (These are those countries which had turned bankrupt, and the major European countries had bailed them out in order to protect the economy of the European Union). As a result, the lending capacity of banks came down. But this interest-based system cannot survive without interest-based loans. Hence, when the companies stopped getting fresh loans, they stopped their production. The customers had also become habituated to purchasing things using consumer loans. Since loans were no longer freely available, sales too got affected. This is also an important cause of economic stagnation. Now, the government is using the hard earned money of honest taxpayers to make an influx of about fifty thousand crores in the banking system. They are merging nationalised banks and providing them with money from the state treasury to rein in this crisis. In order to offset this loss, the government has procured 1.75 lakh crores from the reserve money of the Reserve Bank of India.

It is for this very reason that Islam has forbidden interest in clear and explicit terms:

> "O you who believe, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied. But fear Allah, that you may be successful. And fear the fire that has been prepared for the disbelievers." [Aale 'Imran: 130-131]

The Qur'an also says that interest robs wealth of its blessings. Such a wealth might look like it is growing and flourishing to the outward eye, but it is actually getting depleted.

> "Allah destroys interest (i.e., takes away blessings therefrom) and gives increase for charities (i.e., increases blessings in the person's wealth). And Allah does not like any sinning disbeliever." [Al-Baqarah: 276]

Prohibition on interest gives rise to an alternative system which is equity based and not interest-based. In this system, both the financer and the trader share equally in the risk of conducting business. If the business brings profit, they both share in the profit, and if there is a loss, the loss is borne by the financer as well. This alternative financial model has many advantages.

The entire business is transacted on the basis of a predetermined sharing of profit and loss. Hence, there is no window left open for instability or the phasic cycles of recession and growth which keep occurring in an interest-based system. The various parts of the financial system like procurement of capital, production of goods and their sale, savings, etc. begin to show a harmony with each other, and equilibrium is established among them as per the needs of the market. Since there are no cycles of growth and recession in this system, there is no such thing as a sudden increase in employment or a sudden loss of employment. Similarly, prices are maintained with no sudden inflation. The businessman is not required to pay interest at a fixed rate, instead, he makes the financer a partner in the actual profits earned. Hence, even businesses with a low profit margin flourish under this model, and there is ample money left for welfare schemes. And if at times the business is not being very profitable, the business still continues to run and the capital does not stagnate. Thus, optimal use of the capital allays the risk of stagflation.

Since millions of investors of the country share in the profits accrued, they receive more dividends if the businessman earns more profit. Thus, the wealth does not siphon off from millions of investors to a handful of businessmen, and we do not see the kind of disparity that is seen in a capitalist economy. By sharing in the profits, the wealth of the investors (who form a very large part of the population) increases, their spending capacity goes up, leading to an increase in demand. The entire economy grows. Thus, eradication of interest is vital to the eradication of economic exploitation, injustice and disparity.

While participating in a TV debate on the current financial crisis, the former minister, Milind Deora had stated in quite explicit terms that the businesses of those who transact their business on the basis of equity finance are most secure today. Moreover, their businesses are showing minimal signs of stagnation. Only those businesses have been affected which depend on banks and loans.

3. Corruption, Politician-Capitalist Nexus and Opportunistic Policies

The factors we have discussed above are related to another important factor—corruption and the unholy politician–capitalist nexus. The capitalists, with an eye on immediate gains, bribe and pressurise the government to formulate policies in their favour. The governments not only formulate those policies, they also direct nationalised banks to lend them huge sums of money.

Close to fifty thousand crore rupees were spent in the 17th General Elections, which is twice the amount spent in the previous elections. Of this, 50%-60% of the amount was spent by a single party which eventually returned to power. A major chunk of this fund was obtained through that infamous scheme launched three years ago by former Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley—the

Electoral Bond. Capitalists can donate anonymously to political parties using these Electoral Bonds. Former Chief Election Commissioner, S Y Qureshi was true in his appraisal when he had said that this scheme seeks to legitimise crony capitalism.

As per the RBI, a fourth of the Bad Debts that have driven the entire banking system of the country into a crisis have been taken by a mere twelve companies, the names of which have been withheld. Companies are already neck deep in unrepayable loans, and the banks lend them even more money at the insistence of the government. There has been a shocking revelation while investigating the recent collapse of the Punjab and Maharashtra Bank. The bank had lent 73% of its total assets (amounting to six and a half thousand crore rupees) to a single construction company! The company defaulted on the loan, and now the life savings of thousands of poor citizens (more than ten thousand crore rupees) are stuck in the bank.

Crony capitalism has become a pain in the neck all throughout the world. This refers to that corrupt system in which businesses are run not through free market dynamics, but by means of nexuses with politicians and by having inappropriate decisions passed in their favour. When placed on the Crony Capitalism Index, our country ranks amongst the worst on the planet. A major factor leading to the current recession is undoubtedly the situation which Raghuram Rajan has referred to as the Middle Income Trap, which he believes is the greatest threat to the progress of developing countries. When countries reach the middle income milestone in their journey towards development, a handful of big capitalists plot with the country's politicians in an attempt to gain control over all businesses and trade. The oligarchy of a few big companies and their nexus with politicians closes the doors of progress for

all other companies. This pulls down the overall growth and puts the brakes on development. It seems our country is going through this very problem right now. A few major corporates are trying to push aside all other traders and the entire unorganised sector from their way to become the alpha and omega of the country's economy, while the governments are simply dancing to their tunes.

The second most important determining factor in policy making—after the heavy tributes paid by rich capitalists—is the petty and myopic interest of the politician. While formulating policies and taking decisions, politicians take into consideration their own immediate political gains instead of focussing on the greater good of the public at large. The politics of vendetta, blackmail and tax terrorism that is being played out in our country has severely undermined the trust in the market. Even with demonetisation and GST, we notice that political motives override economic motives. The latest and most telling example of policy making directed at satisfying petty political interests is the current situation in Kashmir and the decisions that have been taken in this regard.

In the past few years, Jammu and Kashmir had reported a very fast growth. In the year 2016, especially, the growth rate had crossed 17%. Despite its long and volatile history of insecurities, the per capita income of Jammu and Kashmir was more than that of states like Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar. The poverty rate is far less than the national average. In terms of Human Development Index, this state leaves behind even developed states like Gujarat and Karnataka. In the 'State of the States Survey' conducted by India Today, this state had taken the place of pride in the country in more ways than one. For instance, the health sector of Jammu and Kashmir was more developed than any other state. In 2017, it was ranked 6th in the country in terms of infrastructure and 8th in terms of education. This tells us that this state possesses

some extraordinary opportunities of economic growth. If the state would have been allowed to develop, it would not only have benefitted the state and its residents, but it would also have strengthened the economy of the entire country. But the recent political decision has been taken at the exact time when apples were waiting to be plucked, the tourist season was at its peak and the hotels had been booked till October. The apples are now rotting away on the trees. Jammu and Kashmir made up for two thirds of the apples grown in India. The state used to earn six and an half thousand crores from apple exports alone. At a time when the country is in dire need of increasing its exports, it is feared that this entire harvest has been rendered waste. The twelve lakh tourists who visit the Valley each year would not be able to arrive this year. 40% of the state's economy is supported by the service sector, which has been left completely paralysed.

This incident brings to the fore one more causative factor of our poor economy—the narrow-minded immediate interests of our rulers which always take precedence over the interests of the public. And this is why politics always overshadows the economy. These issues are yet again crying out aloud and attesting to the fact that as long as our rulers do not develop God-consciousness and a sense of accountability within themselves, we can never have true justice.

Our Responsibilities

These conditions provide us with a golden opportunity to turn to Islam's just and compassionate system and to enlighten our fellow countrymen on the merits and blessings of justice based economic principles proposed by Islam. If instead of keeping ourselves engrossed in securing our own rights and being defensive and getting entangled in short-term issues, we show some confidence and determination and focus on our actual

responsibilities in the capacity of being '*Khair Ummah*,' then the current situation gives us various fascinating opportunities of communicating the principles of Islam. It is necessary for us to participate with all our strength and resolve in all levels of discussion meant to determine the factors leading to the economic crisis and seek its solutions. We also need to make it clear to the general public that there is no shortcut solution to these problems.

The only immediate and simple solution to this problem is that the government should focus on pro-poor policies. In its poll manifesto, the Congress had promised a minimum annual income of seventy two thousand rupees to the poor public. Now, even the Congress leaders do not insist upon that scheme, despite the fact that it is only through such welfare and social schemes that the demand can be raised and the economy can be brought on the development track.

The long-term solution is that the government should abstain from formulating policies under the pressure of capitalist neo-colonialism. The Constitution of India envisions a Welfare State. Unless policies are not formulated in accordance with this vision, and attention is not paid towards equitable distribution along with growth, such crises would keep coming up.

But the real and conclusive solution lies in the eradication of interest, eradication of gambling, the institution of *zakat*, etc. The citizens of the country should hold earnest discussions on these topics. These solutions have been prescribed by the Creator of the universe Himself, and the current situation has made it amply clear that it is impossible to solve the complicated issues of modern economics without resorting to those measures. The eradication of corruption and the implementation of the above measures in the right spirit require God-consciousness and the

realisation that we would all be held accountable before Allah for our deeds.

Along with tabling these topics for discussion, it is also necessary for the Muslims to do whatever they can to introduce to fellow countrymen, Islam's financial, business and economic model. The various experiments of interest-free microfinance that members and associates of the Jamaat are conducting in different parts of the country are quite encouraging. The reports that are coming in tell us that the common people of the country are also getting impressed by it. This model can pull the plug on farmer suicides. It can save poor businessmen and small-scale manufacturers from getting entangled in the never-ending trap of interest-based loans, thus ensuring past-paced growth in small-scale businesses. Microfinance is indeed a very small matter and it cannot be used to influence the entire economy, but this small project can serve to present a small example of Islamic finance before the nation and provide practical proof of the Qur'anic claim that an economic system purged of interest can usher in goodness and blessings and growth and progress.

It is the need of the hour that other sections of the Ummah should also participate in this movement of providing interest-free microfinance, and our country's non-Muslim brethren should also benefit from it on a large scale. It should especially be promoted in villages and among farmers. If this really does happen, it would be a great service to the nation by fellow Muslims. It would also support the economy in some measure and the nation would start paying attention to Islam's alternate economic system. It would hopefully help in building a positive public opinion in favour of Islam and also put an end to this caustic environment of Islamophobia. In order to achieve this, it is also necessary to run these microfinance schemes not only in strict adherence to Islamic values, but also in compliance with its

core objective and the actual spirit of Islamic finance. The Islamic principles of partnership should prevail. We should try to stay clear of resorting to loopholes and shortcuts, and make an earnest effort to present the true essence of Islamic philosophy through this practical model.

Likewise, it is also required that practical Islamic models of trade and business should also come forth before the nation.

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Resistance Against Oppression

The first and most basic requirement of a peaceful resistance is to call a spade a spade. The injustice needs to be called out and the unjust rulers should be admonished against perpetuating injustice. They should be criticised for their overtures without getting concerned about the repercussions thereof.

Resistance against oppression has been engrained in the nature of all life forms, not just humans *per se*. Even a small ant resists when someone tries to harm it or kill it or shove it aside. Just like individuals, the survival of nations and groups too lies in their ability to stand up to oppression. Every tyrant expects its victim to surrender unconditionally and nothing less. But the destiny of those nations/groups which surrender and yield to tyranny and oppression is always perdition. Never has it happened in history that a nation has triumphed over its tyrants without adopting necessary resistance, nor has it ever happened that the tyrants have been moved to mercy and spared their lives. Of course, standing up firmly to tyranny is not a piece of cake. It is a path strewn with thorns and a path which demands sacrifices. But it is also true that this is the only path that leads to salvation. Every act of oppression either ends with the end of the oppressor or it ends with the end and defeat of oppression in the wake of

strong resistance to oppression.

Islamic Teachings and Resistance to Oppression

One important quality of the Muslims, as mentioned in the Qur'an, is that they are not easy fodder to oppressors.

> "And when an oppressive wrong is inflicted upon them, they (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves." [Ash-Shura: 39]

While explaining this: Maulana Abul Ala Maududi writes:

> "This is one of the most distinguished qualities of the believers. They are not easy fodder to tyrants and oppressors. They are kind and forgiving and relenting in nature, but that is not so because they are weak. They have not been trained to be timid and helpless like monks. They are so dignified that when in a commanding position, they pardon those under their subjugation and are not vengeful despite being capable of taking revenge. When a weak person under their command commits a mistake, they turn a blind eye towards it, but when a mighty person abuses his power to transgress against them, they dig their heels against him and bring him to task. A believer is never scared of a tyrant, nor does he bow down to any arrogant oppressor. He is a tough nut to crack, the one who tries to crack it cracks his own jaws in the bargain." [1]

For the followers of Islam, resistance to oppression is not only a natural requirement, rather, it is something that their religion commands them to do, and it is something that is an important part of their identity and position. It is the mission of all Muslims to see to it that the dark clouds of tyranny are cast off, that the entire world is freed of tyrants, so that all the people of the world can breathe in freedom. Establishing justice and uprooting oppression is among the core objectives of Islam. Its importance and the axial position it enjoys in Islam can be gauged from the fact that it has been one of the very reasons for which Allah had sent His Messengers. *"Indeed, We sent Our Messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the scripture and the*

balance that the people may stand forth in justice." [Al-Hadeed: 25] Apart from the Messengers, even the other Muslims have been commanded to not only resist oppression against their own selves, but also stand firm for truth and justice and do everything they can to stop injustice wherever possible. *"O you who believe, stand firm for justice as witnesses to Allah."* [An-Nisa': 135]

Shah Waliullah Muhaddis Dehlavi ﷺ goes on to write:

> "Verily, one of the most important reasons for which the respected Prophets ﷺ were appointed was to uproot oppression and injustice among people. Oppression wreaks havoc with human life and makes it miserable. This is too obvious to warrant an explanation." [2]

And it does not stop at that. Not only have the Muslims been commanded to stand up to injustice and resist any oppression, staying silent and indifferent to oppression has also been condemned in the strongest terms. The Prophet ﷺ has said this very explicitly that not protesting against injustice invites divine wrath and punishment.

> "If people come across an oppressor but do not hold his hand to stop him, God will soon send His punishment on them all." [3]

Enjoining good and forbidding evil is an important pillar of Islam, an obligation at that! Resisting oppression is a very important part of 'forbidding evil.' Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had said that one of the most important reasons that led to the downfall of Bani Israel was that their dignified class had abandoned the task of enjoining good and forbidding evil. There is a renowned *hadith* which ends with the following admonition to Muslims:

> "By God, you would either enjoin good and forbid evil and take the oppressor by his hand to stop him and compel him to work righteously and stand upon truth and justice or (i.e., if you don't do so) God would turn your hearts against each other and curse you as He had cursed the Israelites." [4]

It is for this reason that the eradication of oppression and injustice has been an indispensable part of the prophetic mission. This aspect of the prophetic mission stands out very vividly in Prophet Musa's ﷺ life. Prophet Musa's prophetic mission is not only recounted at several places in the Qur'an, it also happens to be the most recounted of all prophetic missions. We find references to his mission at about a hundred places in the Qur'an spread over thirty Surahs. Pharaoh was a dynastic, racist, oppressive and tyrannical ruler. Prophet Musa was a member of the Bani Israel, which was a victim of the Pharaoh's racist regime. In the capacity of being a distinguished Messenger of Allah, Musa's primary task was undoubtedly to call people to Allah. But along with this, he (and his brother) were also told:

> "So go to him [the Pharaoh] and tell him, 'Verily, we are Messengers sent by thy Lord. Send forth, therefore, the Children of Israel with us, and do not torment them.'" [Taha: 47]

Even Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had stated that eradicating oppression and establishing justice was his mission statement. He had said:

> "By Allah, this mission would reach completion. There would come a day when a person would ride from Sana to Hadhramaut; and he would have nothing to fear but Allah."[5]

There are several such *hadith* in which the abolition of tyranny and oppression, and the establishment of peace and security has been described as an important sign towards the completion of the prophetic mission. The Hilful Fuzool was nothing but an agreement to stop injustice. It had been signed by Muhammad ﷺ well before he had been appointed a Prophet. He was only twenty then. But even years after being conferred with the prophetic office, he had said that even now, after the dawn of Islam, I would readily offer my services if called upon in the name of that agreement, or that I value this agreement more than

red camels. [6]

The words, the companion of Prophet, Rib'i bin 'Amir, had spoken in Rustom's court also testify to this aspect of the prophetic mission. He had famously said:

> "God has sent us so that we might liberate men from the slavery of men and make them slaves of God instead, that we might release them from the constraints of the world and introduce them to its vastness, from the tyrannies of false religions to the justice of Islam." [7]

Even after the era of the blessed Prophets, in every age thereafter, this aspect has always been at the forefront of the struggle of all the Muslim reformers and revivalists. Awe-inspiring episodes of struggle against injustice can be found associated with all the important religious figures of Islam. Most of them have had to go through untold trials and tribulations during the course of their struggles. It was this courageous resistance to unjust and tyrannical rule that also led to the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Imam Hussain ﷺ. Abdullah bin Zubair ﷺ was also martyred for the same reason by the tyrant, Hajjaj bin Yusuf. Imam Abu Haneefah ﷺ, who had raised his voice against the oppressive rulers of his era, had adopted a clear stand that the clause 'forbidding the evil' would hold applicable against oppressive rulers, and that it is necessary to do so. His conversation with the Khurasani jurist, Ibraheem Alsaigh, is often cited during any discussion on this subject. The Imam had told him that if the ruler does anything wrong then it is utmost necessary to rein him in. He then cited this *hadith* by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that

> "One leader of the martyrs is Hamza bin Abdul Mutallib, and the other is every such martyr who stands up to a tyrannical ruler, stops him from committing injustice and gets killed in the bargain."[8]

Because of his bluntly honest speech and his refusal to

endorse the unrighteous acts of the rulers, the Imam was arrested during the tenures of three governors. He was flogged several times in his life for the same reason, and he died of this torture while he was in prison. Several biographers suggest that he was poisoned to death, the unjust rulers spiked his food in prison.

Shaikhul Islam Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله refused to part with his right to free speech, the right to express his opinion. He spent many years in prison and breathed his last in Damascus Jail. Mujaddid Alf Sani was imprisoned in the Gwalior Fort. Of late, standing up to Western colonialism and tyranny has been the hallmark of Islam's followers in each and every corner of the world. The history of our own country's independence can never be complete without mentioning the unparalleled sacrifices of Syed Ahmad Shaheed رحمه الله, Syed Ismail Shaheed رحمه الله, Maulana Mahmoodul Hasan رحمه الله and others.

The second half of the twentieth century and these initial years of the twenty-first century testify to the strong resistance Islamic movements have shown against injustice and the extensive sacrifices they have offered in this cause. Hasanul Banna Shaheed رحمه الله's martyrdom at the prime of his life, Syed Qutub Shaheed رحمه الله being hanged to death, Maulana Maududi رحمه الله's prolonged imprisoned of several years and the devoted and resolute struggle of the Ikhwanul Muslimeen, the Palestinian Resistance Movement and several Islamic movements all over the world are chapters of our glorious history that the Islamic movement prides itself upon. The fact remains that the history of no other community or religion can boast of such relentless and large-scale resistance struggles against oppression and injustice.

Resistance: Armed or Peaceful?

The struggle that is carried out against the oppressive powers of evil to eradicate its menace is called Jihad. This is a terminology

adopted by the Qur'an, and it introduces it as an important obligation levied upon Muslims. It is articulated in very clear terms in Islamic teachings that Jihad can have a number of forms. Jihad is also carried out in the form of a peaceful resistance, through non-violent agitation, activism, writing and speaking, etc. and, in some cases, it also takes the form of an armed conflict within the framework laid down by the *Shari'ah*. [The major component of this framework is that armed conflict can be initiated only by state and not by non-state groups] It is the situation that decides which form of Jihad is to be adopted, but carrying out struggle against tyranny and exploitation is a must, every Muslim is duty bound to carry out this obligation.

Islam makes it mandatory upon the states to wage war against injustice provided they have the required resources to do so, and permits them to use force in this cause.

> "And what is the matter with you that you fight not in the Cause of Allah and for the oppressed among men, women and children who say. "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and helper." [An-Nisa': 75]

Armed resistance against injustice and tyranny is usually the preserve of governments. Here, we are not discussing the conditions necessary for armed resistance. Hence, overlooking the details thereof, as far as ordinary Muslims are concerned, in most circumstances, Islam makes it obligatory upon them to resist injustice in a peaceful and non-violent manner. This is especially so when the injustice is not in the form of a direct attack on one's life and property, but pertains to the usurpation of someone's rights.

If the resistance is peaceful, the ones staging the protest gain a high moral ground. In today's democratic societies, public

opinion plays a decisive role in collective matters. Peaceful and non-violent protests, coupled with the relentless unilateral violence against them by the powers-that-be, gradually tilt the public opinion in their favour. This moral victory has a very important part to play in defeating oppression.

A peaceful resistance makes the protest a mass movement. As the risk involved goes down, more and more people join the movement. Such movements spread very fast and gain mass appeal. Experts believe that in the current age, the probability of success of any peaceful resistance is at least ten times that of an armed resistance. According to a study, more than 50% of peaceful movements undertaken from 1900 to 2015 have been successful, while the success rate of armed movements has been very low.[9]

In the modern era, governments are equipped with advanced weaponry, an organised force and possess an extraordinary control over means of communication and transport. This lends them unmatched power, making it impractical for common folk to stand up to the state's power. However, even the state and its seemingly limitless power are helpless before public opinion. This is why a peaceful resistance can achieve what an armed confrontation cannot.

It is quite easy for the state to defeat an armed resistance. This is not the case with a peaceful one, it does not die down so easily. It remains alive and keeps presenting itself in various forms. Because of its persistence, the influential class of society too starts distancing itself from the oppressive powers.

Even the slightest act of violence in an otherwise peaceful resistance gives the oppressive powers an opportunity to crush and destroy the movement. Hence, in today's times, the oppressive powers surreptitiously try to instigate violence against themselves. They try to implant extremist elements within the ranks of the

resistance movement in order to veer the movement towards violence and bloodshed.

Islam has not allowed common people to take up arms to regain their usurped rights, it has rather preferred a peaceful resistance. Certain authors have even claimed that Gandhi Ji's model of non-violent struggle was also based on Islamic teachings.[10]

The means and principles of peaceful resistance as enshrined in Islamic teachings have been enumerated here in brief:

The first and most basic requirement of a peaceful resistance is to call a spade a spade. The injustice needs to be called out and the unjust rulers should be admonished against perpetuating injustice. They should be criticised for their overtures without getting concerned about the repercussions thereof.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

"The best of Jihad is to speak truth to the tyrant ruler." [11]

Under normal circumstances, publicly speaking ill about someone or discussing someone's faults is inconsistent with the Islamic code of conduct. But the oppressed person has been granted the right to do so. Allah says in the Qur'an,

> "Allah does not love that evil should be noised about in public, except by one who has been wronged. And Allah hears and knows everything." [An-Nisa': 148]

The explanation of this ayah in Tafseer Ahsan al Bayan is as follows:

> "The *Shari'ah* has emphasised upon the point that if someone notices something bad about someone, he should not make it public, he should instead admonish him in private. In the same manner, criticising someone publicly has also been strongly detested. Committing a sin is forbidden even when done behind closed doors. To make it public is a graver offence.

> The only exception is that you can make the acts of oppression of a tyrant public. One benefit of doing so is that perhaps he would abandon his misdeeds and try to amend his act. The second benefit is to caution people so that they might take their precautions against him."

Some people have tried to seek vindication for the modern forms of protest from this ayah. While expounding upon this: Allama Ibn e Katheer has narrated that famous incident which closely resembles modern forms of protest. A man once approached the Prophet ﷺ and complained to him about his neighbour's ill-attitude and the grievances he had with him. Some narrations tell us that the Prophet advised him to exercise restraint and have patience. But after getting the same complaints again and again, Abu Hurairah narrates that the Prophet asked him to take all his possessions and come out on the street. It is narrated that passers-by used to curse the neighbour of the aggrieved man (after listening to the account of the man doing this sit-in protest). When that neighbour got to know about this and realised that people all over the town are cursing and reproaching him, he personally walked up to his neighbour, picked up his possessions and said: "Please return to your house, you would not encounter any trouble from my side henceforth." [12]

Today's Injustice

Readers must have understood by now that the context of this discussion is the spree of protests and resistance movements that we witness in our country today. It has become exceedingly clear that communal forces are hell bent upon making life miserable for the Muslims of this nation, a process which would eventually make their citizenship doubtful. In my book, *'Badalti Hui Duńya Aur Islami Fikr,'* I have discussed in detail that every tyrant has this trait that he publicly or privately, consciously or subconsciously believes in the philosophy of dividing the

population into classes.[13] In doing so, he considers a section of the population his 'own' on the basis of shared religion, colour, race or class, and relegates everyone else to the category of the 'other' and makes them feel so. All his sympathies and courtesies are reserved for his 'own,' while he treats the 'others' the way animals are treated. Their death or miseries affect him only as much—if at all he is sensitive enough—as one is affected by the death and miseries of an animal. The Qur'an speaks of this attitude when it says: *"Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them, slaughtering their sons and keeping their females alive. Indeed, he was of the corrupt people. And we wanted to confer favour upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors, and establish them in the land and show Pharaoh and Haman and their soldiers through them that which they had feared."* [Al-Qasas: 4-6]

These unjust citizenship laws and the unreasonable proofs that are to be furnished to prove one's citizenship are also directed at creating a division between the citizens of this country and unleashing another round of tyranny and oppression. It is also directed at stemming the tide of Islam's ideological force. Right now, the effect Islamophobia has on anti-Islam forces drives them to weaken the influence of Islam and make it as insignificant as possible. Accordingly, they want citizenship and fundamental rights to remain the privilege of only those who disown Islam and the Islamic identity. The threat they so often hurl—that you would have to change your religion if you want to continue living amongst us—is a very old trick that the unrighteous have been using against Islam. While narrating the attitude of the people of Prophet Shuaib, the Qur'an says: *"The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said: "O Shuaib, we shall certainly evict you out*

of our city—you and those who believe with you—or you must return to our religion." [Al-A'araf: 88] The people of Prophet Lut also threatened him in like manner—But his people gave no other answer but this: They said: *"Drive out the followers of Lut from your city, these are indeed men who wish to be clean and pure."* [An-Naml: 56]

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, too, had to face similar situations. Allah reveals to him:

> "Their purpose was to scare you off the land, in order to expel you. But in that case, they would not have stayed therein after you, except for a little." [Bani Israil: 76]

The Islamic Movement and Resistance Against Oppression

Whatever we have discussed until now makes it clear that this situation is not a novel calamity for Muslims. Most Prophets and Messengers have encountered some or the other form of oppression during their respective tenures, and our response to the oppression we are facing ought to be in line with their pristine example.

We have already explained that the Prophets have always raised their voice against injustice. They spoke truth to power. They did everything that they could to stop the oppressors in their tracks. This was an integral part of their mission, a practical testimony of the cause they championed.

Even today, the Islamic movement cannot remain indifferent and oblivious of the tyranny and injustice that is being perpetuated all around. It would go against its very ethos and nature. Keeping mum and being indifferent would be a reverse testimony, which would be antithetical to the very principles and values of the movement itself. It is incumbent upon the Islamic movement to call out injustice using absolutely unambiguous words, to unmask it, to cultivate public opinion against it. This

clear stand against injustice would also serve to expound and propagate the core ideology of the movement and mould public opinion in its favour.

The second point is that this resistance to injustice and tyranny would necessarily be peaceful and non-violent. Under no circumstance would the movement be a part of any violence, nor would it collaborate with any other movement that pursues a violent path. It would also remain cautious that mischievous elements do not get any opportunity to brand it a violent movement.

The third thing is that the core ideology/value system of the movement is nothing but Islam. Hence, even while protesting against injustice, it would neither speak nor adopt any attitude that goes against the tenets of Islam. Why, the Prophet ﷺ had forbidden the usage of slogans based on tribal patronage even during wars!

> "He who wages war in the darkness under an unknown banner, he who gets enraged because of tribal prejudices or calls towards tribal patronage or assists therein, and he dies in that state, would die in a state of ignorance.[14]

The Qur'an calls upon the believers to refrain from being unjust even to the pagans [Al-Maidah: 8]. Meticulous attention needs to be taken to ensure that our resistance against injustice should not snowball into a communal issue. The movement should not emerge as a communal and sectarian group. At the same time, it should also not happen that our own stand and ideology gets diluted when we cooperate and collaborate with other peace-loving secular forces, reducing us to a pawn in the ongoing class struggle. We condone neither communalism nor class struggle. We consider all human beings our brothers. We call upon each of them to serve and worship the same God. The moment this fact gets obscured, the movement would land itself into trouble.

The fourth and most important point is that all precautions should be taken lest this resistance against injustice overshadows the actual and core work of the movement or makes us neglectful of it. The anti-Islam forces would love to see the torchbearers of truth and justice get engrossed in protests, neglecting their actual work in the process. Their mischiefs are directed towards this end too. Diverting people towards God, reforming the Muslim society, community building and progress, serving mankind and winning over their hearts is the core agenda of the Islamic movement and its actual work. True, complete and sustainable justice can only be achieved by moving ahead with this agenda with all patience and steadfastness. Hence, we cannot afford to get put down by fleeting obstacles along the way. Despite the extremely oppressive environment of racism prevalent during Prophet Musa's time, the primary task he had been assigned was to call the Pharaoh towards God. He was commanded thus:

> "Go, you and your brother, with My signs and do not slacken in My remembrance." [Taha: 42]

Likewise, the Prophet ﷺ has been repeatedly urged to overlook the hurdles and insults hurled at him and continue with his task of inviting people to God unabated. And this is what the Prophet did—be it during his exile in Shabe Abi Talib or his difficult journey to Madinah during the emigration—he never lost momentum in his main work of bringing people towards their Creator. Even today, the path laid out before us is the same. Protest against injustice we certainly must, and we should indeed fight every injustice tooth and nail, but we should never forsake our actual and primary task.

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Conspiracism, Conspiracy Theories and The Islamic Stand

Irrational conspiracy theories make larger than life figures of evil mongers who disobey God. They make them appear as exceedingly powerful, possessing extraordinary strengths and abilities, and the masters of such absolute powers that all matters of the world are subject to their will and plan, to the point that they are considered omnipotent and omniscient.

Difficult and scary situations act as breeding grounds for conspiracy theories. These days, as trials and tribulations cascade over the Islamic world, these theories are also becoming more and more popular among the Muslims. In certain circumstances, we are also coming across what sociologists call '*Conspiracism*,' which refers to a conscious or subconscious belief that all the major events, which turn the course of history, are brought into existence by the conspiracies of a handful of powerful people.

Conspiracies are an undeniable part of human life. Conspiracies occur right from everyday mundane issues to matters of international strategic importance. The Satan is essentially a conspirator. He has said: *"So by Your Majesty, I shall surely*

mislead them all" [Saad: 82]. Accordingly, the Satan's followers have been indulging in conspiracies all throughout history. Some people are naturally inclined towards cheating, plotting and conspiring. Likewise, there are certain organisations which feed on conspiracies to such an extent that it becomes part of their nature and they indulge in conspiracies every other day. Some conspiracies succeed while some others fail. To stay aware of evil conspiracies and to plan ways and means to foil them is essential to the promotion of goodness and righteousness in society.

To this extent, discussing conspiracies, analysing them and charting out strategies to counter them is indeed necessary, and we find a fair share of such discussions in the writings of all intellectuals and analysts worth their salt. But the extreme thought process and perspective that constitutes conspiracism is far removed from such earnest discussions. Those subscribing to this thought process see a conspiracy behind each and every event taking place in this world. They believe that the actual determining agent in history is a clandestine group.[1] People who fall prey to this thinking never accept any event or incident on its face value. They see conspiracies in large-scale disasters like earthquakes, storms, tsunamis, pandemics and locust attacks, and also in those which affect people on an individual level like cancer, AIDS and road accidents. And not only this, they also believe that all these events are the conspiracies of one single powerful group which is trying to gain control over the entire world. They link this international conspiracy group to even the good things happening in this world. Be it attempts at environmental conservation or campaigns to contain certain diseases, everything is seen as a part of that global conspiracy. They are not able to see any thing or any possibility of good in this world. According to them, every powerful man and institution of authority is either evil personified or an agent

of evil no less.

Conspiracy theories abound not only among Muslims and citizens of the third world, but also among citizens of developed countries. In fact, most conspiracy theories emanate from the West, especially those paranormal theories involving the Illuminati and Freemasons and other such groups.[2] Apart from Islamic traditions, the ideas and prophesies revolving about the Dajjal and the signs of the Last Day, which flood our circles now and then, also owe their source to archaic Christian Antichrist and End time theories. There are many people in the West who still believe that the earth is flat, that the moon-landing was fake, who deny climate change and the environmental crisis and treat them as the conspiracies of some sinister groups. There are people who consider vaccination as a dangerous tool of some ominous plot. When he was alive, it was widely circulated that Adolf Hitler is the Antichrist! There are also people who believe that the entire history between 614 CE and 911 CE (the 300 years beginning from the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ to the Islamic conquest of Europe) has been fabricated, and no such period ever existed.[3] Just as we have some Muslims who blame the Jews for anything and everything bad that ever happens in this world, we also have countless people in the West who firmly believe that the Muslims are an extremely sly, cunning and influential community, and that their influence on world events is so profound that they are soon going to reign supreme over all of Europe, and that highly influential European and American rulers, wealthy capitalists and intellectuals are aiding the Muslims in this conspiracy. This theory is called Eurabia.[4] Some also believe that Barack Obama is actually a Muslim who has been planted by Muslims in the American administration as part of their conspiracy to take over the USA, or that he is the Antichrist himself. It is also being

believed these days that the Dajjal is actually a global alliance of Islam and Communism.[5] And there are many more.

These examples tell us that conspiracy theories are popular across cultures. The only difference is that when it comes to developed and educated societies, these theories are branded fringe and paranoid, but when it comes to ours, even the mainstream thought in our country sways under its influence.

Three Types of Conspiracy Theories

When seen from the angle of possibility of having evidence and authenticity, there can be three possible types of conspiracy theories:

1. Those theories which have already been proved with strong evidences and testimonials. For instance, the fact that the war on Iraq was not intended to destroy some 'weapons of mass destruction,' but to take over their oil reserves has been proven beyond doubt (For example see Chilcot Report[6]). We have analytical reports by reliable judicial and quasi judicial commissions, of various riots which unmask the underlying conspiracies at play. The fact that a systematic plot is being hatched in the name of 'moderate Islam' to misguide Muslims and distance them from the Qur'an and *Sunnah* has been proved with strong documented evidence. The trade and economic conspiracies of capitalist colonial powers, their attempts to spread lies and to promote the culture of obscenity, nudity and consumerism through the media are also those conspiracies which have been proven using sound investigations. The only problem is that such irrefutable evidence is usually made available years after the occurrence. Nevertheless, these evidences and their details can be used to unravel similar future conspiracies.
2. Next are those events in which the element of conspiracy has not been proved per se, but it is backed up with strong cirumstancial evidences, or the official explanation to those events is far removed from what is apparent thereof and the official narrative seems quite implausible. For instance, people have raised serious questions on

the US government's explanation of what happened on 9/11. In our own country, responsible intellectuals and senior officials have raised doubts over the government's statements on many cases of terrorism. The alternative theories which are presented to counter the official narrative are no doubt are also not conclusive enough, but the official narrative is also unconvincing. Hence, there is a good probability of a conspiracy. Questions should definitely be raised on such events. Alternative theories should be studied in all earnest and the quest for truth should continue unabated.

We can call these two categories rational theories. The distinguishing mark of these rational theories is that we find examples of such conspiracies throughout history. Wars and riots are outcome of human excesses. Wars have been fought throughout history for material pursuits, but the real motive has always been hidden behind make-believe narratives. Such conspiracies are quite possible today as well. Their effect is limited—they affect a limited number of people over a limited area and last for a limited time. We do not require any superhuman power or some international consensus to bring such conspiracies to fruition, they play out following the normal course of nature. It is possible to unmask them and fight them. We should definitely exercise caution against such conspiracies and caution the people about them. We should take a stand against them and proactively take a note of such conspiracies and the lessons we learn from them. We shall not be discussing these rational theories in this essay. What we would instead be discussing is the third type of theories—the irrational ones.

3. Irrational theories are the ones which are based not on some concrete intellectual source or knowledge, but on assumptions and conjectures. They spread thanks to social media apps, unfamiliar websites and news portals and tabloids which love to sensationalise everything. In our country, even the mainstream media does not shy away from spreading such conspiracy theories, leave alone

emotionally charged orators and amateur writers.

The Hazards of Irrational Conspiracy Theories

Irrational conspiracy theories have a number of social, psychological and practical hazards. The biggest practical hazard is that the wrong analysis involved, spoils the course of our strategy and action plan. The events we come across are a product of several internal and external factors. There exist, the overt and covert efforts of numerous enemies, there are accidental events which are beyond anyone's control and there also remain our own weaknesses, wrong judgements and moves, misdeeds and mistakes.. The complicated combination of all these factors gives birth to an ill-fated and hazardous situation. A proper response to this situation is possible only when we have identified all these factors and determined their exact ratio and proportion and scrutinised them to arrive at an appropriate solution.[7] But a mind which is swayed by conspiracism is unable to engage in this taxing exercise. For them, every problem and every crisis is the conspiracy of that single imaginary power. With a little creative thinking, they contort the apparent picture of the concerned event to make it appear suspicious and then link it to that conspiring power. Hence, this thinking and mind-set creates serious impediments in arriving at proper solutions and never allows us to formulate a definite strategy or action plan.

Such conspiracy theories are nothing but an escape route. Serious, proactive and determined men never fall prey to such hearsay. Those who have conducted research on the psychological aspects of conspiracism[8] conclude that it is the outcome of the mental state and depression of losers.[9] When individuals and nations are devastated by failure after failure, and they see no way out of the quagmire they have seeped into, they see refuge in irrational conspiracy theories.

Since these theories and the analyses they support to, do not suggest or arrive at any practical programme, they only promote stagnation and procrastination. Those who believe in such theories have nothing worthwhile to do but to proclaim and spread those theories. They keep themselves busy in seeking a conspiracy angle in each and every event. The feeling that these conspiring elements are all-powerful and all-pervading makes one assume that all our efforts and endeavours would anyway turn futile, leaving no drive whatsoever to plan, strategise, strive, struggle and stand up to the challenges.

These theories are the outcome of a severe form of depression and disappointment, and they further promote depression and a sense of status quo. When a person feels that his life is in complete control of an unseen enemy who controls everything that happens in this world, then he sees no point in making an effort. These are usually those events and occurrences which provide strong grounds for research and investigation, inventions and discoveries, efforts and endeavours. But if someone is consumed by conspiracism, why would he seek the real and actual cause behind that occurrence? He would simply call it a conspiracy and all he would do is curse those conspiracies, nothing else.

Conspiracism has an effect on social relations too. People who are overawed by conspiracies suspect everyone outside their closed circle of co-ideologues. They refuse to believe the cause or factor of any event that the people believe to be true. They cannot get along with anyone because it becomes difficult for them to cooperate and collaborate or associate with anyone. They harbour a variant point of view about even those things on which the people hold a unanimous consensus.

Such ideas breed in communities especially when they reach the final extent of their decline.[10] When helplessness and

self-apathy reaches its limits, communities start viewing everyone and everything with suspicion. The Muslims' own history testifies to the fact that conspiracy theories have been immensely popular in every phase of decline.

Conspiracy Theory: Valid or Invalid?

The question that now arises is which theories should be considered rational and which ones should we consider irrational? When we refer to the Qur'an for this purpose, we get very clear answers. We shall first present our study of the Qur'an on this topic and then touch upon the modern academic standards of evaluation.

Conspiracy Theories and the Islamic Viewpoint

The Holy Qur'an grooms its followers in such a manner that a believer can never succumb to an irrational approach. The Qur'an considers superstitions and blind faith a product of pagan mentality. Likewise, conjectures, obscurities, unreasonable suspicions and unfounded assumptions and presumptions also stem from a weak faith. The Qur'an strongly denounces the obnoxious attitude of ignoring the obvious truth and delving into the hidden realm. *"And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge, for every act of hearing seeing and matters of the heart would be inquired into."* [Bani Israil: 36]

The attitude the Qur'an wants to promote makes a believer accustomed to seeing all events and occurrences and all the matters of his life in light of God's ayah and His *sunnah*, as also his own experiences and factual evidence.

We shall now enumerate some principles deduced from the Qur'an which provide firm standards to evaluate these conspiracy theories.

1. Those who spread evil and corruption are very weak people

Irrational conspiracy theories make larger than life figures of evil mongers who disobey God. They make them appear as exceedingly powerful, possessing extraordinary strengths and abilities, and the masters of such absolute powers that all the matters of the world are subject to their will and plan, to the point that they are considered omnipotent and omniscient. Illuminati, Freemasons, Zionism and even the right-wing fascist forces of our own country are thought to hold the reins of every small and big event that occurs in this world. From political and economic matters to even natural disasters, from scientific research to moral and cultural trends, there seems to be no aspect of human life which is not controlled by them. They never seem to fail, and there is not a leaf that falls without their knowledge and consent. They plot and plan, and everything in this world happens in accordance with their plan, down to the last detail.

The Qur'an, however, tells us that the satanic powers that indulge in conspiracies are very weak and insignificant, more fragile than a spider's web. The biggest and most powerful conspirator is Satan himself. But God calls his conspiracies extremely weak: *"So fight the associates of Satan, for verily the plots of Satan are extremely weak."* [An-Nisa': 76] The Qur'an says that those who disobey God are living under a false impression of their power and abilities: *"Verily, the disbelievers are living under self-deception"*. [Al-Mulk: 20] Even powerful emperors like Pharaoh and Nimrod, who had claimed divinity, had been granted limited and imperfect authority. While narrating their plots, the Qur'an gives us the universal principle that *"the plots of the disbelievers end up in nothing but errors and delusions."* [Al-Momin: 25] No single person can possess unlimited powers or wield global authority!

2. God keeps a check and balance on people by means of other people. He prevents the occurrence of global and perpetual corruption by making them fight each other and

curtailing their might

The Qur'an says that all corrupt people are essentially weak and are given to tearing apart each other.

> "We have placed among them enmity and hatred until the Last Day. Whenever they kindle the fire of war, Allah extinguishes it. And they strive throughout the land causing corruption, but Allah does not like corruptors." [Al-Maidah: 64]

Every conspiracy theory is rooted in the assumption that God's enemies are a well-organised united front. The Qur'an refutes this hypothesis when it says:

> "Their mutual violence is severe. You think they are united together, but their hearts are divided. That is because they are a people without reason." [Al-Hashr: 14]

If a group wishes to take down the world with their conspiracies, it is imperative that they should be united. All the people and institutions of influence and authority and all those people who can have any say in a matter should necessarily be loyal to them. For instance, in order to fool people in the name of a natural calamity, it is necessary that all the rulers of the world, all the concerned scientists, statisticians, the managers of all concerned government and non-government organisations and companies and all the experts on their payroll should be a part of this conspiracy. This essentially means that millions of people need to be involved, all belonging to various nations and communities, religions and ideologies, their loyalties differ from each other, and at times clash with each other. The same applies to the issue of vaccination and climate change. Is it possible that they all become puppets of a conspiracy group who had united together to commit such a horrendous crime against humanity? And is it possible for them to cause perpetual (or even a long-standing) corruption on earth?

Our study of the Qur'an tells us that it is against the scheme of God for all the people of the world to act hand in glove with those causing corruption on land on such a large scale. On the contrary, it is God's way that He uses one group of people to keep a check on another group of people. *"And if it were not for Allah checking some people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but Allah is full of bounty to the worlds."* [Al-Baqarah: 251]

Maulana Abul Ala Maududi explains this ayah thus:

> "This means that in order to keep the world running smoothly, God has made a system by which He allows some people to reign supreme over the world to some limited extent. But when those people cross their limits, He breaks their might by means of some other people."[11]

3. No single person or group of people can ever gain absolute and universal control over the world and all its matters

The Qur'an does not mention or hint towards any such all-pervasive conspiracy which would make the entire world fall to its knees. Wherever the Qur'an speaks of any conspiracy, it speaks of it as something very weak and hollow. It says that Islam's enemies try to conspire against it, but Allah too plots against them. *"They plan and Allah too plans, and the best of planners is Allah."* [Al-Anfal: 30] Just as la ilaha is always read along with illallah, it is a compulsory component of faith to add 'Allah plans' to 'they plan.' This is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The Qur'an says that conspirators fall into the trap they have laid down for others. *"We have thus placed within every city the greatest of its criminals to conspire therein. But they conspire not except themselves, and they perceive it not."* [Al-An'am: 123] It also says that these conspiracies are short lived, and they eventually fail. *"Indeed they had plotted sedition before, and upset matters for you,*

until the truth arrived and the decree of Allah became manifest, much to their disgust." [At-Taubah: 48]

The most powerful of organisations are helpless before God. No man is powerful enough to enslave all mankind. Such a thought is akin to associating someone with God's omnipotence, amounting to shirk.

4. Assumptions and conjectures, suspicion, irrational conspiracy theories, belief in baseless rumours and spreading them are all condemnable.

We find the mention of several conspiracies in the Qur'an. A thorough study of those passages allows us to understand the Qur'anic point of view on the various dynamics of conspiracies. Assumptions, conjectures and baseless presumptions, suspicions, creating and spreading rumours, believing in those rumours and forming a perspective and attitude on their basis—these are the core dynamics of every conspiracy theory.

Surah Nur speaks of a malicious conspiracy that goes by the name of Ifk. During the course of its analysis, the Qur'an says: *"Behold, you received it on your tongues, and said out of your mouths things of which you had no knowledge, and you thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of God."* [An-Nur: 15]

The guidance that has been given in this: as also the guidelines and principles that have been given in the successive: makes the Qur'anic stand fairly evident—that an obsessive prying attitude and the spread of baseless rumours is highly condemnable. A believer should instead develop his approach on sound arguments, investigation and evidence.

When the magicians announced their faith before the Pharaoh, he and his yes-men reacted by saying, *"Surely this is a trick which you have planned in the city to drive out its people."*

Here, conspiracism is presented as the outcome of a defeated mind.

In the case of those conspiracies, however, which are exposed by clear and manifest proofs and testimonies, the Qur'an encourages us to deal with them with a sharp mind, foresight, courage and determination. A clear example of this is the case of *Masjid-e-Ziraar*, in which the Qur'an says: *"You should never stand for worship in this masjid."* [At-Taubah: 108]

5. Natural calamities are a sign of God's power and an admonition from Him.

God has said in the Qur'an that He sends natural calamities to warn mankind. *"Before you, We sent Messengers to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might learn humility."* [Al-An'am: 42]

God has been sending earthquakes, storms and epidemics all throughout history to warn people, manifesting His power and the helplessness of the human race. In the case of the Pharaoh, the Qur'an says: *"So We sent upon them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs and blood as distinct signs. But they were steeped in arrogance, a people given to sin."* [Al-A'araf: 133] It is not possible that God's ways have changed in the 21st Century, and that God has now outsourced these calamities to conspirators!

6. The enemy's conspiracies against the Muslims succeed because of our own weaknesses.

People routinely conspire against each other. The Qur'an makes it amply clear that if the otherwise weak, lame and debased conspiracies of mischief makers appear to succeed, then it is the weakness of Muslims themselves that is to be blamed. When the believers become vulnerable, they fall prey to the conspiracies of satanic powers. Even when it comes to the Satan's own conspiracies, God says: *"You would surely have no authority over my servants, except those who put themselves in the wrong and follow you."* [Al-Hijr: 42]

The Qur'an asks us to cultivate *sabr* and taqwa, it would

help us overcome any conspiracy coming our way. *"If good touches you, it distresses them, but if harm strikes you, they rejoice at it. And if you show sabr and taqwa, their plot will not harm you at all. Indeed, Allah is encompassing of what they do."* [Aale'Imran: 120]

Another facet of difficulties and crises is that of trial and examination. God tests some of His servants by putting them into difficulties. But many a times, difficulties are caused because of internal factors. The Qur'an has been very explicit in stating that the difficulties that befall us are not the result of some external factor, but we are ourselves responsible. We need to seek the causes of our weaknesses, defeats and difficulties in our own selves, not elsewhere. *"Whatever misfortune befalls you is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many of them He grants forgiveness."* [Ash-Shura: 30] Our arts and sciences, our glory, our influence, our strength and power, our golden past and everything that we pride upon are not taken away by enemy conspiracies, but by our own weaknesses. God has called this His fixed principle, His way. *"This has happened in accordance with God's way that He would never change the grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls, and verily Allah is He who hears and knows all."* [Al-Anfal: 53]

The Qur'an has discussed in detail certain catastrophes that have befallen the Muslims, but it has never blamed enemy conspiracies as the primary cause of those setbacks. For example while analysing the debacle at the Battle of Uhud, the Qur'an does not say that all this happened because the Quraish had come with a foolproof plan, or that someone had hatched a sinister conspiracy or that they had a great military commander like Khalid bin Walid on their side and they tricked you by attacking you from the rear. While we do know about all these things from books of history, the Qur'an refuses to lay the blame of the defeat on these factors. What the Qur'an instead says is, *"Why is it that when a single disaster struck you on the Battle of Uhud, although you had struck the enemy in the Battle of Badr with one twice as great, you said: 'From where it this?' Say, 'It is from yourselves.' Indeed, Allah*

has power over all things." [Aale'Imran: 165] The Qur'an then goes on to elaborate upon the internal weaknesses of the Muslims that caused that debacle.

The Qur'an has provided similar analyses elsewhere as well. Wherever the Qur'an has touched upon victory and defeat, rise and decline, highs and lows, it has sought to encourage the Muslims to lead their lives on the path of knowledge and conviction, investigation and evidence, facts and experiences instead of wandering about in the dark recesses of doubts and hesitations, conjectures and uncertainties, and baseless and unfounded assumptions.

How Do We Identify False Conspiracy Theories?

In the above discussion, we have learnt some important tools to help identify false conspiracy theories. We find supportive evidence of these tools in modern philosophy as well.

A conspiracy theory should be considered false when it fulfils these conditions:

1. Every such theory in which the conspirator is shown as a possessor of some extraordinary and supernatural power, and one who has absolute control over whatever is happening in this world.
2. Every such theory in which a huge natural calamity or a pandemic-like crisis is attributed to the secret planning of some shadow organisation.
3. Every such theory in which there seems to be no possible way out of that conspiracy, and countering which is seen as a futile and unproductive exercise.[12]

Apart from these, there are some other methods which have been deduced from modern modes of investigation and research:

4. The biggest give away of false conspiracy theories is their internal contradiction. Many questions are left unanswered. They clash with prima facie evidence and established scientific facts.[13] For example, the claim that climate change is a lie that has been floated as part of a conspiracy goes against many routinely observed facts.

Or to claim that cancer is not a disease at all, just a deficiency of some vitamin, does not explain the millions of deaths all over the world, even the deaths of those people who believe and spread such theories.

5. One more give away is that those proposing the theory fail to explain who exactly benefits from that 'conspiracy,'[14] and what possible gain can be accrued from it. For example, who stands to benefit from the Corona pandemic? The pharmaceutical companies which would produce its vaccine? How much profit would these companies amass? What is the worth of this profit when compared to the colossal global financial loss that has wreaked this world? If this is indeed the conspiracy of a few pharmaceutical companies, then why are the world's biologists, doctors, hospitals, governments, policy-makers et al supporting them? If there is an organisation which seeks to gain control over the entire world through this pandemic, then how would it achieve this objective? What has this pandemic got to do with some unseen mysterious organisation trying to gain control over the world? And if that organisation is indeed so powerful and influential that it can compel all the governments of the world, and all the world's institutions, intellectuals, scientists, doctors, social and religious leaders to indulge in such an inhuman crime, then why would it stage such a drama when it already wields such absolute power?

6. Conspiracy theories can also be examined by evaluating the scale of the conspiracy.[15] The lesser the people involved in the alleged conspiracy, and the lesser the people affected by it, and the lesser the damage caused by it, the lesser the geographical extent and period for which the conspiracy affected the people, the more likely is it to be true. It is possible for a few people to come together and conspire against a handful of people or a single government for a year or two and cause them some damage. But conspiring against billions of people of the world, conspiring against scores of countries, a conspiracy that renders the entire world helpless, or a conspiracy that keeps running for decades together is implausible

and goes against the established Way of God.

7. False conspiracy theories can also be identified by examining those facts and figures which have been used to propose that theory or used as substantiating evidence. False conspiracy theories are spread using fake news. Attributing false statements to rulers, experts and other men of authority or to twist and turn their statements to misinterpret them, dishing out false and misleading citations from books and journals, fake images and videos, false and fabricated scientific data, misleading but appealing interpretations of scientific principles (by use of heavy jargon) –these are all routinely used to propagate irrational conspiracy theories. It is quite unfortunate that not only ordinary people, but even educated ones are influenced by such things despite the fact that it is very easy today to fact-check. It takes very little effort these days to verify the news we hear and see.
8. There is another form of pertinent investigation called 'epistemic authority.' Here, the knowledge and expertise of those proposing the theory or the data that is used to support it is examined. In this complicated world that we live in, for us to study every matter in complete detail, we need to gain expertise in that particular field. It is utmost necessary to identify and develop faith in the competent and reliable experts who hold an authority on any subject. Many people do not even understand which branch of knowledge the matter concerned falls under. For instance, 'the spread of viruses' does not fall under the domain of doctors, it belongs to the domain of virologists and epidemiologists.

From the examples we have cited above to explain 'rational conspiracy theories,' we can all understand that those who falsify government narratives and question their motives are not ordinary laymen, they are acclaimed experts of their respective field. In the case of the war on Iraq, scores of renowned political scientists and experts on current affairs from all over the world have been refuting the claims of the American and British governments from day one. Those who speak on security issues

during terrorist attacks are senior-most police officers, experts on internal security, judges and other experts. In the case of every rational matter, it always so happens that God puts forth some of His servants to reveal the truth to mankind. If a conspiracy theory is close to the truth, it can never happen that all the experts all over the world would maintain silence over it, and leave the task of unmasking it to unauthoritative, amateur men or those self-claimed intellectuals who possess no expertise on the matters concerned. Hence, investigation also involves examining the competence and qualification of those proposing the theory and having it ratified by reliable experts. This task requires an earnest and meticulous approach. This is because those proposing the conspiracy theory often pretend to be experts in that field. Quacks use heavy jargon to present themselves as expert doctors. Today, it has become very easy to examine anyone's profile, it does not take more than a minute to do so. We need to cultivate this habit. By God's grace, today we have experts available in our circles and among all Islamic movements the world over. We should rely on their word and benefit from their expertise.

9. Apart from these, we have some sophisticated investigative tools like 'falsifiability test' too. Researchers have come up with certain mathematical models[16] which can be used to examine a number of theories. But this is too complicated a topic to be elaborated here, we shall discuss its details on some other occasion. Those interested in knowing more about it can refer to the books I have quoted in the reference section.[17]

The fact of the matter is that people try to cash in on each and every major event. The utterly despicable materialistic mentality of today's world has only contributed to this attitude. Unscrupulous people, institutions and governments can and have been using tragedies and natural calamities and disasters caused by some human error for their own political,

economic and other interests. To exploit an earthquake, tsunami or pandemic for one's personal gains, to resort to lies and exaggerations to this end, to spread false news and rumours, etc. is one thing, but to engineer a calamity as part of a conspiracy is an altogether different matter. There are very high chances of the former, but the suspicions that arise because of it inadvertently lead to the latter.[18] Hence, concerted efforts should be made to understand the details of an event if one suspects a conspiracy, and to see and show only as much as is true therein.

Conspiracy Theories and Ahadith Related to the Last Days

Hadith narrations included in Last Day prophesies and those related to Dajjal are often quoted to fan conspiracy theories. It is thus claimed that whatever bad is happening in this world is being done by the Dajjal and his stooges. People who think on these lines shy away from solutions to the problems, saying that the Dajjal would eventually be defeated by Mehdi and Jesus Christ, all we are left to do is to wait for them and link every small and big problem to the Dajjal's conspiracy and lament upon it!

What we need to understand here is that the end time prophesies narrated by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are very clear and explicit. We need to consider all those prophesies before arriving at any proper conclusion. Quoting a lone narration out of context to claim that the Dajjal is coming and the end is near is an extremely misguiding thing to do. Our history is replete with such loose talk about the advent of Dajjal at every difficult turn.

The conflict we are facing today is between right and wrong, and this is something that has been happening all throughout history. This the conflict between the flame of Muhammad ﷺ and sparks of Abu Lahab, in which we are required to play our

active role, not sit idle and wait for Imam Mehdi or Jesus Christ to arrive. When they eventually arrive, they would fulfil their respective responsibilities. Right now, it is we who are expected to fulfil ours. We would never be able to execute our roles if we begin to see Dajjal in every spark thrown by Abu Lahab. In this ongoing conflict, we are expected to represent the prophetic light and we would be held accountable if we do not. If we strive in the right direction with the required enthusiasm, we can expect Allah's help and support in our endeavours, while the law of nature would decide our success or failure. We have received the same share of skills and resources as our enemies have; there is no need to get overawed or lose confidence. Allah keeps sending us good times and bad times. *"Such days of varying fortunes We alternate among the people"*. [Aale'Imran: 140] Trials and difficult days are short lived. To get unduly anxious and to think of evil forces as some unsurmountable mountain is a grave mistake and a very big psychological weakness.

Our Expected Practical Approach

We should indeed remain alert about what is happening in this world and the conspiracies of evil forces. This is essential to chalk out a proper line of action. But it is another thing altogether to blow things out of proportion and to let it overpower us to such an extent that we begin to see a conspiracy in each and every thing with our tainted glasses. Instead of pondering over what we need to do, we spend every waking hour thinking what they (the conspirators—real or imagined) are doing to us. If this is so, then this is suggestive of a psychiatric problem. We have already discussed how we can weed out the irrational theories from the rational ones. We should definitely work on the rational ones and take appropriate steps to counter those conspiracies. But we must steer clear of irrational theories, and keep the Ummah

from getting engrossed in those as well.

The Muslims, in fact, have been entrusted with the responsibility of taking charge not only of their own matters, they are expected to step forward and take charge of global issues as well. The day we consider ourselves responsible for our issues and those of this world, and take complete charge of their solution, it would mark our first step on the highway of progress and success. The sick attitude of blaming others for our failures is actually an escape route. The person or community that keeps seeking escape routes can never taste success. A successful person is he who accepts his failures too. He seeks the causes of his failure in his own actions rather than blaming others. Since external conditions are not within his control, he leaves them to God. However, he does have a control over his own self, so he seeks to reform himself, put in more efforts, do things more wisely until he meets success.

God has made *tawakkul* (to rely upon God, to entrust our affairs to Him) imperative for a believer's success. *Tawakkul* encourages us on to keep trying without giving up and without losing hope. *Tawakkul* makes us proactive and pragmatic. It helps us concentrate on possibilities. Those things which are not within our reach or those which are beyond our scope and domain, we leave them to God, while we focus our mind and efforts on those things which we are capable of doing and which fall under our scope and domain. The problem with weak and unsuccessful people and communities is that they focus more on external factors, hurdles and others' moves and conspiracies. Successful people, on the contrary, have their eyes fixed on their target. They show only as much concern about the tricks and plots of the enemy as is required for the planning of their plan and strategy. They concentrate on doing only those things which are within the sphere of their abilities and possibilities. As for those things that are beyond their scope of possibilities, they do not bat as much as an eyelid. This is the spirit that *tawakkul* seeks to inculcate. To try to our utmost and to leave the rest to Allah is

what *tawakkul* is. This is a unique thought paradigm. Allah had asked even His own Messenger ﷺ to continue discharging his duties without getting too upset with the plots and plans of the enemy. *"And so did We make for every Messenger an enemy—evil ones among men and jinn, inspiring each other with flowery discourses by way of deception. If your Lord had so planned, they would not have done it, so leave them and their inventions alone.* [Al-An'am: 112]

Syed Qutub Shaheed رحمه الله has written an insightful note on this ayah. For the sake of brevity, I have reproduced only a paragraph from that note here:

> "The conspiracies of these powers do not have a free rein either. They are surrounded by an encompassing boundary of divine plan. Whatever conspiracy these devils plot, they do so within the boundary of this divine plan. And this divine plan is well-regulated. For the believers, this gang of evil mongers and the global powers that back them up are not worth a straw. They are fettered to a pole, they are not free to graze and rampage as they want. God does as He wills, and He never lets everyone they want get trapped in their schemes without any fight or confrontation, far from the wishes of these devils who would like to have an unquestioned authority and wish that people should unconditionally obey them and act upon their whims and fancies. Never! Instead, all the conspiracies of these devils are limited to the boundaries of God's will and plan, they are governed by destiny and follow certain rules. It is for this reason that these evil forces are unable to harm God's allies, except to the extent to which God allows them to test His allies. All matters eventually revert back to God. Hence, the righteous should always keep their faith and hope on God Almighty, regardless of what the Satan wishes or desires. They should remain steadfast on their cause in such a manner that sincerity should be ingrained in their character and deeds, and their hearts and minds become an embodiment of truth. As for the devils' plots and conspiracies, the believers ought

to leave them to God's plan and will, which would remain dominant under all circumstances. This is because all these things work as per the divine plan".[19]

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15. Ibid.

16. *For instance, please check out this interesting mathematical model:* Grimes DR (2016) On the Viability of Conspiratorial Beliefs. PLOS ONE 11 (1): e0147905. https://doi.org/10.1317/journal.pone.0147905.

17. On this topic, the following work book is worth a read. The author has proposed six important scientific methods of evaluation. A difference of opinion with the author on some points notwithstanding, the methods he has proposed are quite beneficial.

    Joseph Uscinski and JM Parent, (2014) American Conspiracy Theories, Oxford University Press, New York. Chapter 2, pp 23-53.

    The following book can also be referred for a deeper study:

    David Coady (Ed) (2006) Conspiracy Theories: Philosophical Debates, Ashgate Publishing Co. London.

18. An interview given by Noam Chomsky on this topic presents a very clear and balanced point of view. https://zcomm.org/zblogs/9-11-institutional-analysis-vs-conspiracy-theory-by-noam-chomsky/ Retrieved on June 2, 2020.

19. Sayyid Qutb Shaheed, فی ظلال القرآن, Commentary to Al-An'am: 112.

End Time, Dajjal and Conspiracism

Adopting a fair and balanced approach regarding prophecies related to the doomsday and the days leading to it is not only an academic requirement, but also a practical need. An imbalance in the perspective causes an imbalance in our practical approach as well.

While a large chunk of these prophesies is indeed based on weak and fabricated narrations emanating from Israeli folklore and biblical traditions, a substantial part owes its source to authentic *ahadith* as well. Sahih Bukhari, Sunan Ibn Majah and Jame' Tirmizi have chapters titled Kitabul Fitan, Sahih Muslim has a chapter titled Kitabul Fitan wa ashratis Sa'ah and Sunan Abu Dawood has chapters titled *Kitabul Fitan wal Malahim*, Kitabul Mehdi and Kitabul Malahim. Under these headings, the respectable *hadith* scholars have collected *ahadith* related to signs of the Doomsday, the evils of the end time and other such prophesies. We shall discuss and analyse these narrations here and try to understand what they actually seek to convey and what we learn from them.

Narrations Related to End Time, and Conspiracy Theories

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has told many signs of the *qayamah* (doomsday) and the days leading to it. He has predicted about an extremely tumultuous period leading to the doomsday. This period would be marked with bloodbaths, the rise of a number of evils, and it would be difficult for a person to salvage his faith. The scourge of Maseeh Dajjal (aka Dajjal akbar and one-eyed Dajjal) has been forecasted. He would be a cruel tyrant, and would possess extraordinary and even supernatural powers, he would also claim to be god and a Prophet. Narrations also speak about Mehdi, who would be a very righteous and efficient leader of Muslims and would establish unparalleled justice in the world. The second coming of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) has also been prophesised, he would save the world from Dajjal. Narrations also warn about the attack of Gog and Magog, who would spill blood and cause unrest all over the world. They would then perish thanks to the prayers of Jesus Christ.

It is impossible for us to arrive at the exact and definite interpretations of these narrations. It is quite possible that the truthful and trustworthy Prophet ﷺ might have used allegories to explain certain aspects of this scourge. For example, Dajjal's extremely fast vehicle has been reported to be a donkey.[1] This donkey would carry Dajjal from one part of the world to another at mind-boggling speeds. We do not know whether it would indeed be a donkey or a sophisticated vehicle of the time which the Prophet referred to as a donkey for ease of his audience's understanding. There is a scope of such analogous meanings in these narrations, and our religious scholars have also hinted at them in their exegeses. But the torchbearers of conspiracism extract far-fetched meanings from these narrations. With

the overstretched imagination, they try to apply them on the contemporary developments and the social and civilisational events of our times. This enables them to declare our age as the end time, i.e., the tumultuous period that would immediately precede the doomsday. But since they cannot show Dajjal, they resort to naming a civilisational system, some government, some technology, some system and other such inanimate things, as Dajjal. Accordingly, for some people, the television is Dajjal, for some others it is the corporate world, for some it is the modern Western political and military establishment, while for some others the entire media is Dajjal. Similarly, those narrations which speak of bloodshed and wars are applied to the contemporary happenings, and it is then estimated that Jesus Christ would descend on so-and-so date and Mehdi would arrive in so-and-so year, the Dajjal would manifest in so-and-so years hence, the world would thus come to an end on so-and-so date. Some readers might feel this an exaggeration, but we have had literature based on such calendars all throughout our history in which dates have been offered for the fulfilment of each prophecy and the 'dooms day date' has also been fixed. Well, it is quite amusing to note that many such 'dates' have already gone by!

This approach and attitude leads to the following consequences, and these effects are clearly visible among a section of educated Muslims and these are fatal for our collective life. It is hence necessary to take notice of it.

Ahadith tell us that Dajjal would possess certain supernatural powers, defying the laws of nature. For example, his vehicle would take him from one part of the world to another in no time, he would resurrect the dead, he would cause rainfall whenever he wants, when he would speak the

entire world would hear him, he would have absolute control over agriculture and food, etc. These supernatural powers are equated with the advancements of modern technology, as if to say that the objective of all these technological developments is to equip Dajjal with the tools and devices he would require. Hence, doubts are raised over every new technology that it is possibly among the mischiefs of the Dajjal. When the first train ran in India, certain writers had averred that this is nothing but the Dajjal's donkey! Such an approach breeds misgivings, detest and abhorrence over technological advancements. If people start believing that the internet, communication technology, 4G and 5G, supersonic jets, rockets, agricultural technology, vaccines, biotechnology, etc. are all tools of the Dajjalic scourge, then which believer would want to be a part of this scourge? (The ill effects of technology, its environmental effects, its ethical aspects, its Islamic perspective, etc. are a separate issue. The modern Western perspective of technology is indeed antithetical to quite a few Islamic values. We have discussed this aspect earlier, and we shall continue to do so too, but what we are speaking about here in particular is the attitude of branding technology itself as Dajjalic scourge and shunning it.) Accordingly, this mentality drives people away from science, technology and technological advancements. These days, the effects of technology are so universal and all pervasive that no scheme of Islamic renaissance is possible without giving it the attention it deserves. It is the responsibility of Muslims to face the challenges thrown by technology with courage and fortitude, wisdom and discretion and a proactive approach. The attitude we have discussed in this point, however, promotes doubts and hesitation, escape and detachment from technology.

1. Certain narrations tell us that in those tumultuous times,

staying aloof from the civilised world and seeking shelter in the mountains and the caves would be a safer alternative. If people start believing that the Last Days have already dawned upon us, that the Dajjal would descend upon us in the next few days and that the doomsday is round the corner, there would be no drive left for effort and endeavour. People would grow averse and afraid of not just science and technology but even of routine social and civilisational life. Accordingly, the protagonists of such views are often seen advocating these things. This attitude creates hurdles in the path of growth and progress of civilisation, and comes in the way of Islam's and Muslims' active and affirmative role in the same. More than anything else, it goes against the basic spirit of Islam. Islam is against materialism, but it is also against monasticism. Far from renouncing the world and escaping its issues, it prepares its followers to play a leading and guiding role in the world and its affairs.

2. Prophecy has it that towards the Last Day, the end of strife and evil and the triumph of Islam would be carried out by a predetermined person, i.e., Imam Mehdi and Hazrat Isa. If people begin expecting the Last Day prematurely, then a common man would lose the motivation to play an active role in the conflict between good and evil and to achieve success in accordance with the law of nature. He would start seeing the future only in the light of prophesies and divine providence, and would fail to understand the importance of his own role therein. The feeling that one is living in the Last Days makes a person sit back and wait for Imam Mehdi and Hazrat Isa to take charge of the affairs. He loses faith in the significance of planning, strategy and struggle. The drive to strive for a cause, accept challenges, endure, strategise and engage in physical and mental pursuits mellows down.

We, therefore, feel that adopting a fair and balanced approach regarding prophecies related to the doomsday and the days leading to it is not only an academic requirement, but

also a practical need. An imbalance in the perspective causes an imbalance in our practical approach as well. Hence, it is necessary to earnestly analyse these things in the light of the Qur'an, authentic *ahadith* and the interpretations and exegeses of reliable scholars.

Only Allah Knows When the World Would End

The Qur'an has stated in several passages that only Allah knows when the world would end.

> "They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the Hour: when is its arrival? Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him. It lays heavily upon the heavens and the earth. It will not come upon you except unexpectedly." [Al-A'araf: 187]

While explaining this ayah, Allama Ibn Katheer writes[2]:

> "Qatadah says that the knowledge of its correct time lays heavily on all creation. There is none in the heavens and the earth who knows about it, they are all clueless about it. Suddi says that even the high ranking angels, the greatest of Prophets are oblivious of it. It would descend upon them unexpectedly."

Surah Luqman has a list of those things of which no one can have any definite knowledge save God. One of those things is the knowledge of the Hour. *"Indeed, Allah alone has the knowledge of the Hour."* [Luqman: 34]

There are many *ahadith* which tell us that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ recited this ayah when he was asked when the world would end.

In Surah Taha, God has told us that He wishes to keep the knowledge of the Hour a secret.

> "Verily the Hour is coming, My design is to keep it hidden, for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its

endeavour." [Taha: 15]

It is part of God Almighty's wisdom and scheme to keep the knowledge of the Hour a secret. The aforementioned ayah of Surah al-A'araf (187) has been explained in Ma'ariful Qur'an in the following words:

> "Just as there is a certain wisdom involved in keeping the date and time of a person's own death a secret, so also, keeping the doomsday—which is nothing but the collective death of the entire cosmos—a secret also involves quite a few points of wisdom. The first wisdom is that life itself would become onerous for those who believe in it and it would become difficult for them to do anything in this world, while those who do not believe in it would find an excuse to ridicule and laugh at it when they hear that it is still a long time away, thus adding to their rebellion. Hence, prudence demands that its date be kept under wraps, so that people should always remain fearful of its terrifying events. It is this fear that acts as the single most potent factor in keeping man from sinning."[3]

There are several *ahadith* in which the Prophet ﷺ has pleaded ignorance about the actual date of the doomsday. In a renowned *hadith* —that goes by the name *hadith* of Jibril—it has been narrated that Arch angel Jibril approached the Prophet in human form while he was sitting with his companions. He asked the Prophet several questions, and the Prophet gave him appropriate answers. But when he asked the Prophet *mata as-sa'ah*? (When would the Hour occur?). The Prophet simply replied that 'the one who is asked does not know any more about this than the one who is asking.' What this means is that neither Jibril nor the Prophet have any idea when the world would end.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has, however, informed us of certain signs of doomsday in quite a few *ahadith*.[4] But when we study those *ahadith*, we realise that although the way in which

the Prophet has related these signs does generate inquisitiveness and concern in the minds of the Muslims, they do not specify the exact date of the doomsday. Maulana Rafi' Usmani writes:

> "Given the large corpus of signs and their intricate details, the reader often comes to assume that he would be able to join the dots and successfully arrive at the exact date of the doomsday. But this has never actually happened, and nor would it ever happen in the future. The Qur'an explicitly says: "it (the doomsday) would come upon you unexpectedly". To begin with, most signs lack any chronological order, it is difficult to understand which event would precede or follow which event. Even when it comes to those events whose order has been related in *hadith*, we have no certain knowledge about the time interval between two successive ones. There are some other *hadith* in which the words that have been used are so generic that their exact import cannot be determined, to the point that readers even find apparent contradictions on some occasions. But it should be understood here that those are not actually contradictions, it is just that the words employed are very generic and non-specific."[5]

To pry into the exact date of the doomsday despite these facts, and to calculate its month and year, is a futile and meaningless exercise. The fact remains that every person's death is his doomsday! His time is up when he dies. The Prophet ﷺ has very often drawn parallels between the two. Bedouins used to approach the Prophet and ask him when the Hour would arrive. The Prophet would point towards the youngest among them and say, "If this child lives long enough, your Hour would arrive before he grows old." After narrating this *hadith*, Imam Bukhari رحمه الله remarks: "Hashham states that the Prophet was actually alluding to their death".[6] In other words, you all would die before this child passes away, and that itself would be your Hour, your doomsday.

Signs of the Doomsday, and Their Three Categories

The signs of the doomsday that have been mentioned in authentic *hadith* can be broadly classified into three categories. The first category consists of those signs which have already manifested themselves. The second consists of those signs which are very general in nature, and it is extremely difficult to fix a date on the basis of those signs. Some of those signs keep manifesting again and again in various ages. In many ages following the Prophetic era, people have seen those signs appearing. The third category consists of those specific and very explicit signs which would immediately precede doomsday.

Of the first category, i.e., those signs which have already appeared, the first sign of doomsday is the passing away of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. During the Tabuk Expedition, the Prophet had narrated six signs of Doomsday to Auf bin Malik(RA) the first sign being his death.[7] There are other similar narrations which can be found in books of *hadith*. The Qur'an has itself called the splitting of the moon a sign of doomsday, and this sign has already occurred. *"The Hour has come, and the moon has split in two."* [Al-Qamar: 1] The Prophet had also spoken of those events as signs of doomsday which occurred immediately after his demise. For instance, the prophecy that two groups of Muslims would go to war against each other.[8] Most *ahadith* scholars have opined that this refers to the Battle of Siffin, which was fought 27 years after the Prophet's demise near the Euphrates. The Prophet had also said that the rise of false claimants of prophethood is also a sign of doomsday.[9] We all know that several people had claimed prophethood immediately after his demise, and many such false claimants have come up in every age. On one occasion, the Prophet had said that the Conquest of Jerusalem is also a sign of doomsday.[10] This event has occurred twice—four years

after his demise, during the tenure of Caliph Umar ﷺ, and in 583 AH, under the command of Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi ﷺ when he had reclaimed Jerusalem from the Crusaders. A huge fire spreading from the land of Hijaz has been spoken of as a sign of doomsday.[11] Imam Al-Nawawi ﷺ has referred to a huge fire that broke out in 654 AH and claimed that this event, too, has already occurred.[12] Once, the Prophet joined his two fingers and said that he and the doomsday have been sent in this manner.[13] While elaborating upon these things, *hadith* scholars have written that now that the last and final Messenger of God ﷺ has been sent, the doomsday is very close as per divine calculations. Whatever age of the world has been left is far lesser than what has already passed. It is for this reason that the Prophet had said that the end is near. What he wanted was that his followers should always lead their lives with this at the back of their minds—that the doomsday is quite close.

Emergence of Evil and Disorder (Fitna)

The second category consists of those narrations which speak of certain evils and disorders as signs of approaching doomsday. These signs are also called *alamaat-e-sughra* (Lesser Signs). Before the final signs of doomsday become clear, the days would be littered with various chaotic events, and they would turn very intense towards the final days. We have authentic *ahadith* in which the Prophet ﷺ has sketched a very terrifying picture of these chaotic events and has cautioned the Ummah against these.

These chaotic events would be in various forms—tyranny and bloodshed, an attack on one's faith, a spree of difficulties that would befall the believers and a deluge of evil.

For instance:

> "Of the signs of the Hour is that knowledge would be taken away, and ignorance would become widespread. Alcohol would be consumed (in the open) and fornication would

become common."[14]

"The world would not end until indecency and lewd speech become the norm, relations would be broken and neighbours would be commonly ill-treated."[15]

"The world would not end until the tribes of my Ummah would join the pagans and start worshipping idols."[16]

These evils have been seen in near about all times and ages. There is no objective standard of what constitutes 'common' or 'widespread.' Such evils have surfaced many a times all throughout history. There have been waves of oppression, bloodshed, chaos and strife, vulgarity and vice many times in the history. We do not know how many more such waves and periods would come and go before the world finally ends! When we see these evils, we should realise that their widespread culture can herald doomsday. This also seems to be the very purpose and idea behind these warnings—to point out the evils which invite divine wrath, that their surge is a sign of the world coming to an end.

For a man, a sickness or an accident can lead to death. But a man is confronted with several episodes of sickness and accidents all his life, which essentially serve as divine warnings and make him heedful of his death, until he eventually succumbs to his final sickness or accident. Likewise, in the collective life of mankind, these crises and signs would keep surfacing time and again to warn mankind. One hadith in particular tells us that every wave of evil would be worse than its preceding wave—"Every period would be worse than its preceding period, until you finally meet your Lord"[17]—until the doomsday finally befalls us. If some of these chaotic events do occur around us, then it cannot be said with certainty whether this is indeed the end

time or not. Neither do we have any firm grounds to make such estimations, nor do we even need to do so. We are accountable for the responsibilities we have been entrusted with, and we are expected to make every possible attempt to save ourselves from every evil. And this is something that we need to continue doing no matter what.

Signs like the emergence of Gog and Magog can be treated as objective signs. But there are opinions that this is part of a chain of events that is spread over an extended period of time, and it has already been set into motion many centuries back. While elaborating upon the *ahadith* related to Gog and Magog, renowned scholar of *hadith*, Hazrat Anwar Shah Kashmiri رحمه الله writes that the Gog and Magog would keep coming to us on several occasions all throughout history and spread disorder in the world. Just before doomsday, they would spread disorder once again in the presence of Hazrat Isa عليه السلام. *hadith* literature tells us that Isa عليه السلام would curse them and they would thus be wiped out. Maulana Kashmiri has identified Timor, Genghis Khan and Hulagu Khan as Gog and Magog too.[18]

The Major Signs of Doomsday (Alamaat-e-Kubra)

The third category consists of those signs which are very specific and explicit. It includes the advent of Dajjal, Hazrat Isa and Imam Mehdi, a major battle with the people supporting Dajjal, the collapse of an army in the ground that would march towards the Ka'aba, the emergence of a particular creature called Dabbah, the sun rising from the west, etc. Scholars of *hadith* refer to these signs as *'alamaat-e-kubra'* or major signs. These are the final signs, after which the world would end any moment.

These major signs are quite explicit. Several attempts have been made in the past to interpret those signs in a way that they somehow confirm to their respective ages. But such interpretations confirm neither with the words of the *hadith*, nor their spirit. One of the major signs is the advent of the

Dajjal. His personality has been variously interpreted to support many a conspiracy theory. Many have tried to insinuate that modern civilisation, the world order, political and economic colonisation and other such inanimate things are Dajjal. These are all superfluous interpretations. Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi ﷺ writes:

> "Those *ahadith* which mention Dajjal, his signs and attributes, are absolutely unambiguous in their words, to the point of tawatir. It is clearly mentioned therein that the Dajjal would be a specific person with specific qualities. He would arrive at a particular and specific time, and he would be born in a specific community—the Jewish community."[19]

Of the several false allegations that had been levelled against Maulana Maududi, one allegation was that he did not believe in the advent of Dajjal. But he has refuted these allegations when he wrote:

> "That Dajjal would come, he would possess these attributes and he would spread disorder, these constitute genuine news that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has conveyed from God. None of the narrations in this regard contradicts any other narration."[20]

These explanations make it clear that those *ahadith* which speak of the Dajjal also speak of his specific signs and attributes. Ignoring them, and declaring some institution or inanimate entity as Dajjal, is an uncalled for effort. When we study authentic *ahadith* on Dajjal, we understand one very important thing—that he would not be a clandestine conspirator who would keep himself hidden and deceive the believers. Hence, there is no need to make lame assumptions or fall prey to doubts and suspicions in his regard. Whenever he would arrive, he would arrive with his identity intact. The clear signs we come across in *ahadith* tell us that he would be a living entity possessing paranormal

qualities and he would claim to be Allah and a Prophet. Apart from these, it is also mentioned that the word kaafir would be written between his eyes, which every believer would be able to read, regardless of him being a literate or illiterate person.[21] This means that it would be very clear and public that he is a leader of the disbelievers, no believer would be in two minds about it.

Similarly, technological advancements are erroneously condemned as the Dajjal or his tools. Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani's opinion is very pertinent in this regard:

> "To have an extraordinary control over laws of nature is not something that would make a person the Dajjal *per se*. On the contrary, the Qur'an teaches us that benefitting from the laws of nature is an essential feature of man being the vicegerent of God on earth. This is nothing but an exfoliation of the concise knowledge of 'things' that Adam was equipped with."[22]

Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri's student, Maulana Badre Alam Muhajir Madani ﷺ has written something very important on this topic:

> "No matter how much material progress is achieved in our times, they are all governed by laws of nature. Branding them as Dajjal's tools is extremely misplaced, rather, it is absolutely wrong to say so. There is no doubt about the fact that the inventions we are coming across today are quite amazing and mind-blowing, but all developed countries of our times are contributing towards those inventions. This is another reason why it is too early to call any of them Dajjal's tools or even their precursors. The real precursors of the Dajjallic menace are religious ignorance, wavering faith and the overpowering control of rebellious powers."[23]

Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani ﷺ has objected to branding 'modern western culture and civilisation' as the Dajjal, calling such allusions an exaggeration of thought and speech.[24]

But he has also said that:

> "Modern Western civilisation appears to prepare fertile grounds for the advent of the Dajjal. The straight and clear and balanced truth—which does not warrant convoluted interpretations of *ahadith* —is that although it is true that claims of the Dajjal's advent are all premature, we should accept that the scourge in which the Dajjal would submerge this world has already begun in some form or another."[25]

Maulana Abul Hasan Nadvi ﷺ has also expressed the same opinion. In his eye-opening book, 'Ma'arka Imaan wa Madiyat,'[26] Maulana has written the following about modern Western materialistic culture:

> "The spirit of Dajjal and deception entered this culture and ran into its veins because it took a stand against prophethood, belief in the Hereafter, faith in the Creator and His Omnipotence, His laws and teachings. This culture gave more importance to what man could sense and perceive, and took interest in only those things which could satisfy man's carnal desires, his immediate needs and grant him apparent success and dominion."[27]

My humble study tells me that the precursors to Dajjal have been witnessed in every age and era. The spirit of Dajjal and deception has been an integral part of evil satanic systems and cultures all throughout history. This is not a recent phenomenon, Islamic history is replete with instances when the events of their respective era have been interpreted as precursors to Dajjal. The events that immediately followed the demise of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (widespread apostasy, false claims to prophethood, etc.) to the events that followed the Rashidun Caliphate to the attacks launched by the Mongols and the Crusaders to Western Colonisation, the period of submission to Western powers and the phase of neo-colonisation—in every

such phase, evil powers have been thought to be precursors to the Dajjal. Hence, these precursors also seem to be among those chaotic events which belong to the second category (*alamaat-e-sughra*) discussed above. It has been mentioned there that these should be taken as repeated collective warnings, just as illnesses and accidents are. One of these warnings can well be the last and final warning, and it is quite possible that none of these are. Modern Western civilisation and the current political and military games can well be the precursors of Dajjal, and it is also possible that these are part of God's series of warnings, and that there are many such periods and waves of tumult and oppression marking the ups and downs of history waiting to occur. It is impossible for us to arrive at any definite conclusion in this regard, nor is it required.

What Should Be Our Approach?

What we understand from the above discussion is that the end time has already started with the last and final Messenger ﷺ of Allah, and that chaotic situations keep coming up at regular intervals.

As for those signs which are related to these chaotic situations, we should keep praying to Allah, we should seek His refuge, and we should adopt strategies to protect ourselves from those scourges. This is what authentic *ahadith* emphatically teach us. The Prophet ﷺ has taught us how we should supplicate to seek protection from the Dajjal and his conspiracies, we should keep supplicating as the Prophet has taught us. As for those crises which keep erupting, we should steer clear of debates on whether a particular crisis is the harbinger of doomsday or just one of the many routine crises, and instead stand up to those crises with the courage and determination that behoves a believer. The things the Prophet has told us are part of the divine

plan, and they would manifest themselves at the pre-destined time. We are responsible for what we do, and we should try to discharge our responsibilities come what may.

How should we protect ourselves from evil—Dajjalic or otherwise? Authentic *ahadith* have answers to this question too. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has asked us to recite Surah al-Kahf to protect ourselves from the evil of Dajjal. One narration tells us that we should recite the first ten ayah,[28] and another narration tells us that we should recite the last ten ayah[29] of this Surah. Many scholars have tried to ponder over Surah al-Kahf to understand how it can help in protecting us from the evil of Dajjal. The hints we find in this Surah relate to the same attributes and deeds that are expected of a believer at all times and ages. Hence, regardless of whether we treat Surah al-Kahf as the basis of our strategy, or the general teachings of the entire Qur'an and *hadith*, what we find in common is that the things that can save us from these evils are righteous qualities and actions, and the scrupulous attention to one's responsibilities.

We enumerate here a few of those hints:

1. A close relation with the Book of God

The Qur'an is the most effective and most important tool to protect us from such troubles. So far as Surah al-Kahf is concerned, the very first ayah itself speaks of the Book of God. Then, the instructions that have been given after narrating the story of the companions of the cave (from the 27th to the 30th ayah) begin with the command to keep reciting the Qur'an. *"And recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. No one can change His words, and never will you find a refuge in anyone but Him."* [Al-Kahf: 27]

There is a long narration which conveys this point in a very clear and emphatic manner. Although certain *ahadith* scholars have called it a weak *hadith*, they have confirmed its subject

matter and have even derived from it.

Ali ﷺ narrates that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once cautioned him that a huge crisis is expected. He submitted, "O Messenger of Allah, how should one protect himself from the evil of this crisis?" The Prophet ﷺ replied, "The Book of God! It contains the stories of those nations which preceded you and the news of those which would follow you, and instructions related to the matters you would encounter. It is the decisive word. Whoever seeks guidance without the Qur'an would get only misguidance from God. The Qur'an is the very rope of God. It is an admonition full of wisdom. It is the straight path. It is only by following it that minds remain protected from going wayward. Tongues cannot corrupt it. Men of knowledge would never have enough of its knowledge. It would never grow old. Its wonders would never end. Whoever said anything in accordance with the Qur'an has spoken the truth, and whoever acted upon the Qur'an would deserve rewards. Whoever judged in accordance with the Qur'an has been just, and whoever called others to the Qur'an has been granted guidance to the straight middle path.[30]

The role the Qur'an plays in protecting a person from troubles is quite explicit. In the wake of such troubles, the Muslims should hold on to the Qur'an and strengthen their bond with it. They should make an earnest effort to seek the solution of every matter from the Qur'an and to walk in its light.

2. To remember the doomsday, to focus on the spirit of deen and to refrain from indulging in allegorical statements (mutashabihaat)

The basic purpose of narrating the signs of doomsday is to keep the Ummah alert and cautious about the end of the world. Until clear signs (i.e., *alamaat-e-kubra*, which are so obvious that they would be in-the-face) do not manifest, engaging in lame interpretations, suspicions and conjectures and seeking out signs of the Last Day or being inquisitive about them are

all efforts in futility. To remain engrossed in this matter and to have a never-ending suspicious, agitated and negative attitude about the world and its affairs is an extremely disastrous and dangerous thing to do. We should always remain prepared for doomsday, without hankering after those things which are allegorical and unspecific.

One important lesson we learn from Surah al-Kahf is that people should not hanker after allegorical things. Instead of resorting to meaningless assumptions and baseless conjectures about those things which are beyond our scope of understanding, we should mind our business, focus on our responsibilities and concentrate on the lessons our experiences have taught us. This sick mentality of a failing religiosity revels in pointless curiosity, folklore and gossip and lame fixations instead of learning about the real purpose and spirit of divine commands and signs. The People of the Book were suffering from the same disease during the blessed era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Qur'an criticises this attitude of theirs when it points out,

> "And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and some add nine more. Tell them, Allah knows best how long they remained. He has knowledge of the unseen aspects of the heavens and the earth. How clearly He sees, and how finely He hears! They have no protector other than Him, nor does He share His command with anyone whatsoever." [Al-Kahf: 25-26]

We learn the same lesson from the story of Musa and Khizr ﷺ that we should exercise patience and restraint in those matters which are beyond our scope of knowledge.

> "And how can you have patience about things of which your understanding is incomplete?" [Al-Kahf: 68]

While expounding upon the last sentence of the 187th ayah

of Surah al-A'araf, Maulana Ameen Ahsan Islahi ﷺ has said something which is worth our attention and holds a conclusive position in our ongoing discussion. He writes:

> "But most people do not know which things they need to know and need to pursue, and which are those that are beyond their scope of knowledge. Pursuing the latter would not only waste their time, it would also cause them to get entangled in unnecessary problems. It is man's misfortune that he usually hankers after those things which he can neither understand nor is he supposed to know. He then uses them as a pretext to turn away from those things whose knowledge is essential for the success of his world and Hereafter. Those who hanker after the allegorical things and deny the clear commands are also guilty of the same."[31]

3. To remain steadfast on Islam and to show sabr on the hurdles and problems one comes across in this path and to exhort others to do the same

Speaking on the days preceding doomsday, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said:

> "O people, there would come a time after you when people would be required to have *sabr*. They would have to remain steadfast in trying situations. They would have to hold their ground in unfavourable circumstances. Whoever holds on to Islam and its commandments at that time and continues practicing Islam, would be rewarded 50 times over."[32]

This is also something that we learn from the story of the companions of the cave. Hurdles and challenges can only be overcome by remaining steadfast over our faith. Maulana Maududi explains,

> "If the disbelievers gain absolute dominion, and even if it becomes difficult for a believer to survive in that tumultuous environment, he should not bow down before forces of evil,

he should rely upon God and go ahead."[33]

Surah al-Kahf pinpoints four trials with reference to four characters.

- ❑ That related to one's faith and belief. To protect themselves from this trial, the youngsters left behind everything and sought refuge in a cave.
- ❑ That related to wealth, i.e., to pride upon one's wealth and to rely upon the power of money. The owner of the two gardens succumbed to this trial.
- ❑ That related to knowledge. To protect us from this trial, God Almighty made it clear that there are many things that are beyond the scope of knowledge of even men of stature and ranks as lofty as that of Prophet Moses.
- ❑ That related to authority and expertise. Allah presents the pristine example of Zul Qarnain to show how a man can overcome this trial. Even after achieving a mighty feat, Zul Qarnain humbles himself before Allah and says: 'This is nothing but a mercy from my Lord.' [Al-Kahf: 98]

Thus, the stories narrated in this Surah teach us how we should remain steadfast in our faith with courage, and how we should remain humble and grateful to God upon receiving wealth, knowledge, fame and authority, how we should rely upon Him and use His bounties properly. These lessons guide the believers to overcome all trials and evils along their way.

4. To strive in the cause of God, to stand up to trials and tribulations, to preach the Word of God and convey the message of Islam

In times of strife and tumult, rather than abandoning all struggles and endeavours, we have been commanded to up the ante. We need to take it upon ourselves to counter every evil trend and exhaust all our strengths and resources in doing so. Prophet

Muhammad ﷺ had said that the torchbearers of truth would strive in the Cause of Islam even in the wake of extreme strife and tumult. They would keep fighting evil and evil mongers.

> "This deen would always survive, and a section of the believers would fight for it till the Last Day."[34]

It is in the same context that the Prophet ﷺ had asked the believers to keep up with their task of enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong with all steadfastness in such conditions. He had also said that maintaining silence over a crime is akin to being complicit in the crime.

> "Whoever witnesses these sins and detests them, and keeps others from committing it and publicly condemns it, would be counted among those who keep away from sin. And whoever refrains from committing a sin, but does not detest it either, nor does he publicly denounce it, his silence would be treated as his concurrence. Hence, he would be held at par with those who have committed the sin, despite not having actually committed it."[35]

It should be kept in mind that Imam Abu Dawood ﷺ has included this *hadith* under the chapter, *Kitaabul Malahim*. This chapter deals with signs of the doomsday and the evils that would manifest before it.

The same instruction has been given after narrating the story of the companions of the cave. Regardless of how people react, we should keep preaching the truth.

> "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord—so whoever wills—let him believe, and whoever wills—let him disbelieve.'" [Al-Kahf: 29]

The believers also need to possess technologically advanced tools if they are to fight against evil. The Qur'an explicitly commands us to

'prepare against them to the utmost of your strength and power.' [Al-Anfal: 60].

Technology and means of modern struggles should not be overlooked, mistaking them for tools of Dajjal. We should instead gain mastery over them, and play our role in the production of latest resources by engaging in discoveries and inventions, research and development.

The story of Zul Qarnain also teaches us that in order to protect ourselves from tyrannical and oppressive and bloodthirsty forces, we should adopt all possible measures, employ all available resources, push the limits of discoveries and inventions, think out of the box, utilise our strengths and abilities to the fullest and to then rely upon God.

Whenever there is any talk of the chaos preceding doomsday, people tend to bring to mind those *ahadith* which speak of seeking refuge in caves and forests. Migrating from cities and seeking refuge in forests is the last resort, which would be done when there would be no other means left to salvage one's faith.

"At that time, whoever is able to find some place of refuge or a safe sanctuary, he should take it up."[36]

When it becomes absolutely impossible to protect one's life in the city, people flee to forests and mountains, and return to their normal life once the danger has waned off. The same should be the case with one's faith and religion. However, championing the cause of abandoning the world because of a real or perceived fear of doomsday, and persuading people to give up all struggle and endeavour, is akin to advocating monasticism, which does not confirm to Islamic ideals in any way. The fact remains that a believer is defined by relentless struggle and confrontation, a fighting spirit and tireless effort. Instead of delving into the hidden meanings of allegorical statements and seeking their interpretations, what we really ought to do is to focus on our

responsibilities and to plan strategies that would make truth and justice triumph following the laws of nature, and to then bring those plans to fruition, for this is all that we are accountable for.

5. Organisation and the company of righteous souls

> According to an authentic *hadith*, when the Prophet ﷺ told the people about tumultuous times ahead, the companion who has narrated this *hadith* asked the Prophet, "If I happen to be present during that time, what do you command me to do about it?" The Prophet replied, "Make it obligatory upon yourself to associate yourself with the Muslim community and its leader".[37]

We find this in Surah al-Kahf too. Of the instructions that follow the story of the companions of the cave, one is:

> "And keep your soul content with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening." [Al-Kahf: 28]

Having the company of righteous Muslims and being a part of their closely knit community is all the more required in times of chaos. A lone individual can readily fall prey to strife and evil, it becomes easier for him to ward off evil and defend himself against it if he is part of a righteous group.

Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi and Maulana Manazir Ahsan Gilani have both averred that an important lesson that we derive from the story of the companions of the cave is that we should live together in the company of righteous people. Maulana Gilani writes:

> "The first thing that strikes us when we read the story of the companions of the cave is that instead of referring to the individual cave dwellers, the Qur'an calls them 'a group of youngsters.' You can very well derive a lesson here that in times of strife, when one's faith is being tested, one should convince like-minded and like-natured people to accompany him in

the cave-life so that they might give each other company, and help and support each other and empathise with each other in their time of need."[38]

Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi ؒ writes:

"They could also have fled wherever they wished to, each person going his own way and being happy in his own world. Each of them could have taken refuge in a separate cave or mountain, just as Christian monks of yore used to do in their monastic lives. But God put it in their hearts that they should leave that town together as a group, hold their faith and belief close to their hearts and seek the mercy of their Lord, hoping and expecting a way out, success and divine help. This is the appropriate and correct way which the believers need to adopt in every such suffocating situation."[39]

All the five points mentioned above are expected of believers in all times and circumstances. But they become all the more important in times of strife and trials and tribulation. These chaotic conditions actually serve to remind us of our responsibilities. We should pay attention to these points all our lives, and even if we come across an extraordinarily tumultuous situation, we should not succumb to negative attitudes like abandoning the world or interpret events out of context to determine the date the world would come to an end. Rather, we should pay more attention to our routine responsibilities and try our best to discharge them in a better way.

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